



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

HN P5ZT 5

THE POINTING FINGER

RITA

21488.24.140



HARVARD
COLLEGE
LIBRARY

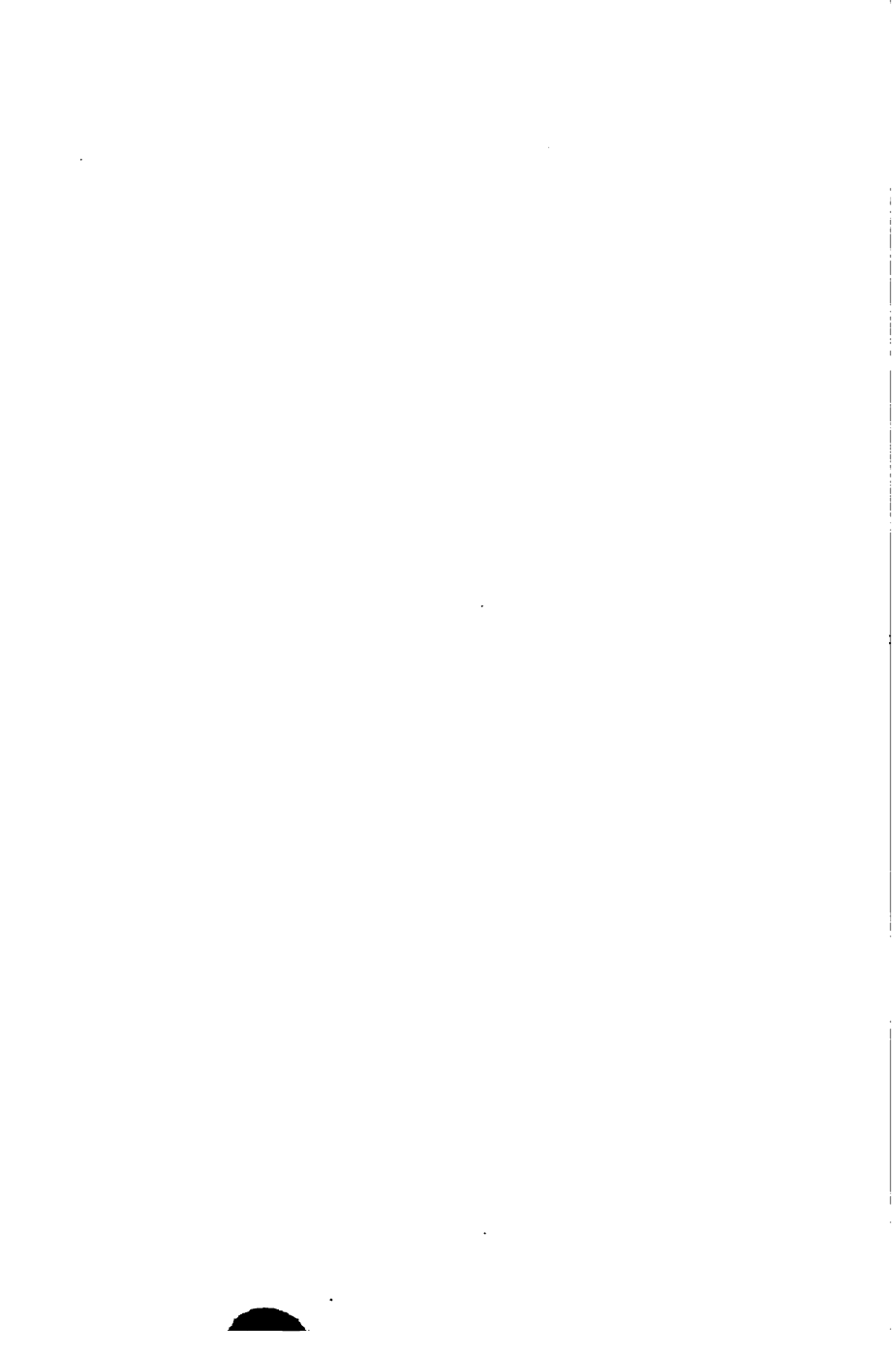
214

214 L

25



THE POINTING FINGER



THE POINTING FINGER

BY

“RITA”

AUTHOR OF

“PEG THE RAKE” “SOULS” “QUEER LADY JUDAS” “VANITY”

“THE MASQUERADERS” “SABA MACDONALD” ETC.

LONDON
EVELEIGH NASH

1907

2100 . - 4.140



THE POINTING FINGER

CHAPTER I

IN a vast chamber sacred to memories of life's entrances and exits—such entrances and exits as mark the importance of great races—an old man lay dying.

Speechless and unconscious of care and tendance, hovering on the threshold of a new life yet still claimed by the exigencies of laboured heart-beats and failing pulse, he lay and waited for the Messenger. By the bedside sat a nurse, patient and attentive. At the foot stood the doctor—respectful of circumstances—patient also, as befits one who waits on rank—even when rank is levelled to the one inevitable condition of its existence in an unimportant world.

One other occupant of the room was a sweet-faced elderly woman—sister of the

THE POINTING FINGER

dying Earl—hastily summoned ; still aware of fluttered nerves, and fearful of future trouble. Trouble or worry in any shape or form standing as hereditary foes to her placid temperament.

It was the last day of the old year. With every passing hour that ebbing life had flowed steadily out from the shores of Time to the mysteries of Eternity. Midnight was at hand ; to be counted by moments—each weighted with anxiety. An anxiety that racked each of the anxious waiters—that flashed from their eyes as they watched the hurrying hands of the timepiece.

“ Will he be here in time ? ”

In the servants' hall below, as in the death-chamber above, that question was asked and answered vaguely. No one knew. No one could assert with any certainty that the absent son and heir of Edensore would arrive in time to receive his father's blessing—or farewell. News of the Earl's failing health had been sent out to South Africa. Following on letters a cablegram had been despatched. No answer as yet had reached the Abbey. It seemed hopeless to expect one now. Yet while a possibility

THE POINTING FINGER

remained, tongues wagged eagerly of such happenings as frame last hours and desperate extremities.

The inexorable moments crept on. The stillness in that vast chamber where the heirs of Edensore were born, where many of the house of Edensore had died, was a stillness that seemed to hold untold mysteries. It haunted the shadows, it spread over corridor and chamber, and stateroom and hall; it lay like a spell on the inmates. On faithful servitors and waiting tenants congregated together, talking in whispers of the sign they had seen; of the curse uttered on this race two centuries ago, and faithfully fulfilled, since none might lift it from that house of doom. And still from lip to lip the eager question passed, "Would Lord Rollestone arrive in time?"

Six weeks since the first message had gone. The old butler pointed out on the map to interested eyes, whereabouts in South Africa the young lord would have been at the time of the cablegram's despatch. They gazed at the printed names and traced his journeyings to the coast and thence to England, and argued for and against probabilities.

THE POINTING FINGER

In the midst of the discussion a sudden silence fell upon them. The great clock in the tower was striking, and as if by one common impulse they held their breath and listened, counting one, two, three, four, and so on to twelve.

The last solemn note echoed and died, and passed into silence. It meant more than the mere passing of night. It was the death-knell of the old year to which they had listened, and following the last stroke came a clang and rush of bells upon the frosty air. The little group sprang up. Hand clasped hand. Dim eyes, sad eyes, bright eyes, exchanged greeting. But there was a sense of restraint in voices and words. It seemed incongruous to speak of joy or happiness in the shadow of Death. Their thoughts flew to that great splendid room in which their master and lord lay, deaf and blind and silent to earth's joy and sorrows. Facing the great mystery. Awaiting the inevitable end.

Suddenly from without came a new sound. The sound of horses' feet on the hard frost-bound drive. The noise of wheels. The old butler and the housekeeper gave vent to

THE POINTING FINGER

hurried exclamations. The other servants loosed hands and murmured excitedly, "It's a carriage. . . . Lord Rolleston's here, after all."

Then the heads of the staff marched with due dignity to the great silent hall, and threw back the entrance doors. The carriage had drawn up. The door was thrown open. A figure jumped out, hurried up the broad stone steps, faced the old servitor and his wife. The light flashed on fair hair, a sun-tanned anxious face.

"Am I in time?"

"Yes, my lord. His lordship is alive, but not conscious."

The young man stood fumbling with the collar of his fur coat. His hands were trembling, his agitation was very great.

"I—I came with all possible haste. Shall I go up? Who is with him?"

"The doctor and nurse, my lord; and Lady Anne."

He said no more, but hastened up the wide oak staircase. It was dimly lit. The first gallery was all shadowy spaces and closed doors. The housekeeper, following closely, noted that the young man stood

THE POINTING FINGER

for a moment gazing about him as if bewildered or uncertain. She attributed the delay to emotion.

"Perhaps, my lord, I had better speak to Lady Anne first," she said hesitatingly.

"Yes, yes do," answered Lord Rollestone with eagerness. "I will wait here until—until——"

She passed on and left him standing in the gallery. Around the walls were countless portraits of dead and gone Earls of Edensore ; their wives and daughters, and sons, and sons' wives. The new successor so soon to be the head of the race, walked slowly from one to another of these family portraits. The type of race was strangely evident. It was the Saxon type of fairness—fair hair, blue eyes, clear fresh skins. No dark Lord of Edensore seemed to have any place in that gallery. From one to another passed the present heir, scrutinising with strange intentness those silent witnesses to a long line of ancestors.

He was standing before the last portrait. It represented a boy—himself at sixteen. The only portrait as yet existing. Most of the heirs of Edensore were painted on

THE POINTING FINGER

their coming of age. The present one seemed to have proved the exception. He studied that likeness for some moments. The bright eager face, the sunny hair, the laughing eyes. He could not trace difference save in the mirror of memory, but he felt there was a difference. He had not removed his hat as yet. Now he remembered the fact and took it off and threw open his travelling coat. At the same moment he saw the figure of the housekeeper approaching. The doctor was behind her.

The young man advanced to meet them. Dr. Bellamy, the old family practitioner, shook hands warmly.

"My dear Lord Rollestone, you are indeed welcome. I am grieved you have so sad a home-coming. I—yes—I regret to say I can hold out no hope. He is not conscious yet, but there may be a rally—at the last."

"I—I may see him?"

"Certainly—certainly. Your aunt is in there. She has been most devoted. I am sure she will be relieved by your arrival. We were so afraid——"

The young man made an impatient move-

THE POINTING FINGER

ment towards the sickroom. Then suddenly paused.

"You lead the way, doctor," he said huskily.

And, with bent head, he followed the old man to the bedside of the dying Earl.

Lady Anne awaited him at the door. She said nothing. Only put her trembling arms about his neck, and held him for a moment. Agitation robbed them both of speech. Then at last Lord Rollestone stood and looked down at the motionless form, the closed and sunken eyes. The arms of the dying man lay outside the coverlet. They were stiff and still. The hands lay palm downwards on the crimson satin quilt, white and rigid as the body. To all appearance life was over, so far as matters appertaining to life were concerned.

Lord Rollestone touched one cold stiff hand; murmured the old familiar name. Suddenly the closed eyelids of the paralysed man quivered, opened. Glazed eyes looked out of a ghastly face. Their glance was returned by the blue earnest eyes of his son.

THE POINTING FINGER

"Father," he said again, "I am here. Don't you know me?"

The dying man's lips shook and parted. But the words were unintelligible.

"You want to tell me—something?" said Lord Rolleston.

The husky whisper framed by a last voluntary effort answered—"Not—not you. Ronald."

"I am—Ronald. Don't you know me?"

The fetters that bound brain and tongue seemed to burst their restraint by one supreme effort.

"No!" cried the Earl. "No. Where is he?—Ronald."

As he spoke that name, his hand lifted itself once more. The fingers still curled around his thumb all save that one. As if in warning, or menace, it pointed straight and stiff to the anxious figure by the bedside.

That figure moved back a step or two, and gazed anxiously from the motionless form on the bed to the little group waiting on this last scene. "He does not know me; his mind is wandering," he said.

The doctor nodded sympathetically. Lady

THE POINTING FINGER

Anne wiped her eyes with a delicate cambric handkerchief. The nurse, cool and impassive, stood with her gaze fastened on her patient. For a moment all was still save for the fall of the ashes, the tick of the clock on the marble mantelpiece.

The shadow of death was in the room. Nearer and nearer it seemed to creep. A grey and awful change came over that rigid face. The hand dropped. For a brief moment it struggled convulsively as if seeking to combat by will the enforced powerlessness of action. Then suddenly it grew still. Still as the awful face ; as the rigid form.

The young man fell on his knees and hid his face against the satin coverlet. And kneeling thus with hidden eyes he could not see that still that outstretched finger pointed even in death at something—someone.

The old Earl of Edensore was laid to rest in the great family vault, and the new Earl reigned in his stead.

All forms and ceremonies had been duly observed. Lawyers had solemnly recounted deeds¹ of trust, investiture, and investment. The property was not encumbered by heavy

THE POINTING FINGER

debts or mortgaged acres. The late Earl had lived a somewhat retired life since the death of his wife. He had not married till he was forty, and for many years no child had been born to him. Lord Rolleston was now four-and-twenty. He had been the spoilt darling of the household, and gone through the usual routine of education. On leaving the university his inclination for travel and daring sport had culminated in visits to India and Africa. With Africa he had been fascinated. His first return from there had been marked by increasing restlessness; by a palpable indifference to home, its interests, or its duties. After his mother's death the restlessness had been controlled by reason of his affection for his father, and a dawning sense of responsibility. But once again the call of the hunter's instinct had made itself heard. Once again the roving restlessness had developed even more strongly. This time he would not deny it.

He made the usual preparations and bade the old Earl farewell. The promise of return on his laughing lips had signalled a two years' absence. He had returned only for that last farewell, that last strange

THE POINTING FINGER

scene which had ushered in his rights of heirship.

A week after his father's death the new Lord Edensore was sitting in the beautiful old library of Caerwydden Abbey, the most important of the family possessions, the house where every lord of Edensore was brought for death or burial. It was a vast, gloomy place on the borders of Wales, a place renowned in history ; a place of three centuries' existence ; a place built on the site of an ancient abbey granted to a member of the family by Henry the Eighth. The story of that grant and its subsequent results was not a pleasant story. But there were other records and other histories of the House of Edensore stored away in the muniment room equally tragic or unpleasant. Like many great houses of old families, Caerwydden Abbey had its legends and traditions. But one such tradition had taken the form of a secret too terrible for revelation—a secret that was known only to the head of the house and his eldest son. Each successor was told of the secret and bound to transmit it again to his heir. When the direct line failed it had been communicated by letter

THE POINTING FINGER

faithfully delivered by the heads of that firm of solicitors who had managed the family affairs for generations past.

It was the present head of the firm who now sat in the library with the new Lord Edensore. He was instructing and advising him in matters connected with the estate. It was this gentleman, old, grim, self-reliant, by name Benjamin Bryantson, who put the sudden abrupt question, "Of course your late lamented father confided the secret to your lordship?"

The young Earl started. He thought of that last scene, those faltering words, that pointing finger.

"Secret!" he said. "No, Mr. Bryantson, I was too late. He was speechless. I could see he wanted to tell me something—but alas! the effort was futile."

The old lawyer removed his glasses and looked somewhat discomposed.

"Dear me, dear me! How sad! how unfortunate! Why, God bless my soul, such a thing has never happened before! Never in our memory. I speak for my firm, of course. We are not impartial judges in the matter. The details are unknown, but

THE POINTING FINGER

the facts are obstinate. No successor to the title of Edensore has ever been left in ignorance of the secret."

" Except—myself ? "

" Yes, my lord, except yourself."

CHAPTER II

THERE was a long pause. Then the old lawyer pushed back his chair, and rising, began slowly to pace the great room to and fro. His eyes were on the carpet ; his brows knit in perplexity.

Those blue eyes of the young man watched him furtively, yet with a certain anxious eagerness.

" You really don't know what this mysterious secret is, Mr. Bryantson ? "

" I have said so. I am the head of the firm now. When my partner died he told me only what was in his power to tell me. That there is a secret. That it is told only to the eldest son. That failing a direct heir, or such contingency as absence, the secret is communicated in a letter given to our care. We have had no such letter. We—I speak for my partner and myself—naturally supposed that you had been made ac-

THE POINTING FINGER

quainted with the matter on your coming of age."

The young man gave a quick, almost apprehensive glance. Then his eyes fell on the papers before him.

"On coming of age," he repeated. "Is—is that usual?"

"I believe so, when there is an only son. And when that son, like yourself, is so frequently absent the rule should certainly have been followed."

"Yes," said the young Earl gravely. "It should. But in this special instance it has not. Do you suppose it is of vital importance? I mean that not knowing it may leave me freer, happier——"

Benjamin Bryantson paused in his walk and stood suddenly before the great open fireplace. He looked thoughtfully at the blazing logs, from thence to the young earnest face of the new successor.

"It is impossible for me to say," he answered. "I only know that this obligation was imperative. That, so far as I am aware, it has never been denied or evaded until the present instance."

Lord Edensore rose impatiently from his

THE POINTING FINGER

seat. "I am not superstitious," he said.
"I have no belief in——"

His voice broke. A look of horror, of fear, unspeakable, flashed from his eyes. He remained gazing at a picture on the panelled walls of the library. The old lawyer, surprised at his abrupt silence, turned his gaze from the fire. He looked at the young man, and then at the picture which had so startled him.

It represented a space of wild barren country. In the foreground was a large stone gateway, and standing before it the figure of a monk. The artist had given to the face peering out from the half-drawn cowl, an almost demoniacal expression. Hatred—intense, pitiless, devilish—glanced from the sunken eyes. They looked out menacingly from the silent canvas ; themselves—a force defying silence. With one uplifted arm the figure stood ; the loose sleeve of the garment had fallen back, and showed a thin, wasted arm, a brown fleshless hand ; and showed, too, what seemed to have suddenly cast that spell of terror on the new Lord Edensore. A finger. One outstretched pointing Finger.

"My God—it moved ! I saw it," he

THE POINTING FINGER

whispered huskily. Then he turned to the lawyer. "Did you see anything?"

"No, my lord."

The young man drew his hand across his eyes. Then he came back to the table, keeping the figure behind him.

"It must have been fancy, of course; but—it was horrible! Just as if the hand was alive and——"

"It is a strange picture — that," said the old lawyer. "Of course you know its history?"

"No-o—at least, I have heard, of course. But I've forgotten."

"Forgotten!" echoed Mr. Bryantson in astonishment. "No one of the House of Edensore can surely forget that picture and its meaning."

"My memory has never been the same since that—that fever I told you of—when I fell among the Zulus."

The old lawyer nodded. "Yes—yes, of course. That accounts for it. I had forgotten. Well, you must have heard that that figure was painted from no living model."

"What do you mean?"

"The artist was a friend of one of your

THE POINTING FINGER

ancestors, and staying here with a wild rollicking set of titled Mohawks. There was a bet made as to the shortest possible time it required to paint a picture. I have not the details very clearly, but I believe the bet was made at midnight, and accepted by the artist. They shut him up in the tower, in what is called the Monk's room. The following noon they came to see how the work was getting on. They found that picture. The artist was sitting in a chair before it, brush and palette still clutched in his hand. He was dead."

The young earl shuddered. "A ghastly story," he said, "if true. I remember doubting it."

"Oh, it's true enough. No doubt of that. You know your home is built on the site or ruins of an ancient abbey. The legend is that the spirit of a dead monk—maybe the Abbot himself—sat for that portrait. Anyhow, it seems hardly possible that an artist could have imagined a face so vindictive or diabolical."

"Yes; but the finger—the Pointing Finger. What of that?"

"Ah!" said the old lawyer. "There you

THE POINTING FINGER

have me. Perhaps that finger has something to do with the secret. I cannot tell. I only know the picture is a horrible one. If I were master here I should have it removed."

The young Earl looked up eagerly. "Of course, why not? I agree with you it is horrible. I will do as you advise. I——"

"Stop, my lord! I did not advise. I merely stated what my own action would be. But that picture must not be removed. It was hung here as promised to the dead artist. Here it must remain."

"Why?"

"My lord, you must be singularly ignorant of the history of the House of Edensore if you are not aware that if that picture is removed dire misfortune follows until it is brought back again. I should not advise you to meddle with it."

"I told you I was not superstitious."

"You did, my lord, and following your words burst out into that confession of the Moving Finger."

"It must have been imagination. Or— or some shadow thrown from outside the window."

"Doubtless. It is no affair of mine. Only

THE POINTING FINGER

if you try your experiment I fear you will regret it."

The young man resumed his seat at the table and drew the papers towards him.

"Do let us remember we are living in the nineteenth century," he said. "Such talk and nonsense is derogatory to modern-day intelligence. We are not subjects of the Dark Ages; nor bound to the iron wheels of priestcraft and superstition!"

"True, my lord, we are not. And I can safely affirm that a more level-headed unimaginative individual than Benjamin Bryantson does not exist within a hundred miles of Lincoln's Inn, or out of it. And yet, this same Benjamin Bryantson has not had dealings with your house and family for nothing. He says, with a wiser man and bolder, 'There *are* things in heaven and earth' that our philosophy wots not of, neither can explain. But now let us get to business as you say. Solid sordid facts may drive away these fanciful cobwebs."

"One moment," interrupted the young earl. "Does my aunt, Lady Anne, know anything of these—mysteries?"

"No, nor Lady Susan either. But then

THE POINTING FINGER

she has rarely stayed here, and now, since she has become the pet of society, she won't waste her sweetness on this gloomy old fortress."

"Lady Susan," murmured the young man. "Yes, she promised to be very lovely. I . . . How old is she, by the way?"

"Old? My dear lord, your memory is certainly to be pitied. There is only a year between you. She is just twenty-three."

"And not married, or engaged?"

"Well, my lord, one would think you might give half a guess at reasons."

Mr. Bryantson dangled his gold eyeglass from his wrinkled forefinger and smiled meaningly.

The new Lord Edensore noted the significance of words and smile. A look of uneasiness crept into his own eyes. There was no assurance on his part that he did guess those reasons, or sympathised with them.

He turned his attention once more to business connected with the estate. He asked a great many questions. At times his lapses of memory or errors of topography surprised Mr. Bryantson. But he had heard such lapses were not uncommon after a fever,

THE POINTING FINGER

and the young Earl had mentioned his illness in letters received a few months back.

After luncheon the Earl had to see his steward and some of the principal tenants. It was all very wearisome, but very necessary, and he was thankful when it was over. About five o'clock he found himself at last alone.

A footman had lit the lamps and piled more logs on the fire, and then asked if he should bring him some tea or if he would prefer to join Lady Anne in her boudoir.

"No," he said curtly. "Bring it in here. Ask Mr. Bryantson to join me."

When the man had gone, the young Earl drew up one of the roan-covered chairs to the fire and threw himself back with a sigh of relief. He was thoroughly tired out. Too tired even to light a cigarette, though his case was in his pocket. He closed his eyes and gave himself up to the comfort and warmth and peace of the firelit room. He must have dropped into a doze unconsciously. He was suddenly aware of a light cold hand laid over his eyelids, of a laughing voice at his ear.

He started up, and saw a girl standing beside him. A girl with a bright mutinous

THE POINTING FINGER

face, a tangle of red-gold hair, and eyes darkly blue as violets. For a moment he saw only those eyes, wondering a little that they were so familiar, and yet so strange. He stared at the girl, and she stood there half smiling, half grave, looking back at him.

"Well, Ronnie," she said at last. "You don't seem overwhelmed with joy. You see I came after all. Mother told me you had not asked after me, but I did not believe her. I thought you could not be so unforgiving. After all, our quarrel was not such a very bad one. We have made up others quite as formidable, haven't we?"

He rose to his feet. She saw that his face had grown very pale under its sun-tan. His eyes met hers with an odd embarrassment.

"This is a—a surprise," he stammered. "I—I did not know you were expected. Lady Anne never said——"

"Lady Anne!" she echoed mockingly. "Well, to be sure! What next? You'll be calling me Lady Sue, I suppose?"

He laughed. Embarrassment changed to relief, to a sudden joyousness that matched her own.

THE POINTING FINGER

"No," he said, "I will only call you what you are. The loveliest and sweetest—cousin—ever man was blessed with."

She drew back a step. Her ripe lips trembled into a delicious pout. "So you are still inclined to be foolish! I suppose that means I am forgiven."

"Of course," he said. "How could any man help himself? I bore no resentment, I assure you."

"Yet you never wrote. Not a line or word for two long years, Ronnie. Wasn't that a little bit—unkind?"

"It was abominable," he said. "But I am truly penitent. Won't you forgive me?"

"I suppose I must. But there, my dear boy, how heartless we are, talking and thinking only of ourselves, and poor Uncle Geoffrey but just passed away! I am so glad you were there at the last, Ronnie. Did he know you?"

"No," answered her cousin, turning his face away from that frank gaze. "He was unconscious. But—won't you sit down now you are here? I have just ordered some tea."

"I promised mother——"

THE POINTING FINGER

The footman entered almost on her words. He was followed by Lady Anne herself.

"It's a case of Mahomet and the mountain, Ronald," she said. "I thought I would join you both here as you would not come to me. Weren't you surprised to see Sue? The naughty child sent no word of her coming. I could hardly believe my eyes."

Lady Sue threw aside her cloak and unpinned her travelling cap. Her lovely brilliant hair shimmered and rippled in glorious confusion about her face. The young Earl's eyes devoured her beauty with a sort of wonder; and almost—fear. He did not seem at ease with her as she was with him. It might have been attributed to his recent bereavement, to the unfamiliarity occasioned by absence; to a recognition of something new and brilliant and bewildering in the girl herself. The assurance and ease of manner that proclaimed her a popular favourite. An assurance and an ease that he lacked and strove in vain to emulate.

She poured out tea, chatting all the time, and making even frivolous things seem interesting by the way she related them.

They were joined soon by Mr. Bryantson,

THE POINTING FINGER

whom she greeted warmly and teased audaciously while her cousin sat silent and observant, and her mother listened with adoring approval. She talked of people, events, things of which the young Lord Edensore was ignorant. So much may happen in two years, and he had never cared for society and its frivolous happenings and changing fads and queer notions of morality. But the girl had all such things at her finger ends, and spoke of Royalties and Court functions and great people as familiarly as personal acquaintance permitted.

"I wish you weren't so silent, Ronnie," she said at last. "You seem to have lost your tongue as well as your memory."

"Susan, my dear—remember," said her mother rebukingly.

The girl glanced at the young man's crimson face, and felt she might have gone too far.

"I beg your pardon, I'm sure. But I suppose I must make allowance for your life and adventures and illness. What a state your father was in when for four months no news came! Really, Ronnie, the heads of a family have no business to go off with themselves in your fashion. Exploring and

THE POINTING FINGER

adventuring and all the rest of it! But I suppose you've had enough at last. You'll settle at home now, won't you?"

"He must," said the old lawyer. "It's his duty. He mustn't shirk responsibilities any longer."

"I don't intend to," said Lord Edensore. "I mean to do my duty. To prove——"

He broke off abruptly. By some strange freak he had glanced not at his cousin's beautiful face, but above her head, at the picture on the wall. And with a sudden shiver, the sick fear of previous experience, his eyes rested on that awful vengeful face of the monk.

And again, as when he had seen it first, he fancied that that uplifted hand with the pointing finger moved, and menaced himself.

CHAPTER III

NOR even the recent shadow that had rested on the old Abbey, not even the ever-brooding gloom that stamped its vast chambers and wide corridors, and closed and silent rooms, could subdue the spirits of Lady Sue.

At dinner she was the life and soul of the small family party. Her acquaintance with her uncle had been one of constant interruptions, and though she had stayed at his London mansion and occasionally at his hunting box in Leicestershire, she had rarely visited the old family seat in Wales.

She evinced some curiosity as to her cousin's intentions. Would he reside chiefly in London? Was he as fond of hunting as ever, or had that pastime faded into insignificance beside the engrossing sport of "potting" big game, and the interests of savage races? He talked of such sport and such savages with a familiarity and ease that he never

THE POINTING FINGER

displayed about home concerns. He told of wild tribes and their ways ; of hairbreadth escapes ; of dangers and perils and hardships that would have shamed the voluble Moor of Venice. And like a second Desdemona his lovely cousin listened, all absorbed and breathless.

" Why, Ronnie, you are splendid ! " she said, as they all sat by the library fire after dinner. " I always knew you were a sportsman by instinct, but you never used to describe your adventures so brilliantly. You ought to write a book. There has never been a literary Earl of Edensore, has there, mother ? You might start the family on new lines. Travels in—where is the place, by the way ? Matabeleland—oh ! yes. You could write it in the Rider Haggard style. It would be sure to be a success. Only, I suppose, you never came across an ' Ayesha ' ? Did you ? If so, you'll be wanting to go back. Oh ! you needn't confess. I shall know you by your actions, like the fig-tree by its fruit. I wish I was a man. We poor women can't go adventuring. Do you know you're very much changed by those last two years of ' a black man and a brother '

THE POINTING FINGER

sort of life. I think there must have been an 'Ayesha' after all."

"Sue, my dear child!" remonstrated Lady Anne.

"Oh, mother! You are so easily shocked. I'm sure Ronnie doesn't mind what I say. And as for Mr. Bryantson, he's past being shocked at me."

"I think your nonsense delightful, Lady Sue," said the old lawyer. "In our stern dry-as-dust life, to come across anyone like you is—is as refreshing as a cool stream in the Sahara."

"What a pretty speech! I must thank the kind gentleman nicely."

She sprang from her chair and swept a low graceful curtsy. Mr. Bryantson smiled approvingly.

"You were always a spoilt child. Now you are—I was going to say a spoilt beauty. You do what you wish with us all."

"Well, I'm very happy. Life isn't half a bad sort of thing. Is it, Ronnie?"

"It is altogether delightful and surprising," said her cousin, looking at her as she remembered she had always wanted him to look. He had not done so in those past days. Well,

THE POINTING FINGER

two years may change feelings as well as appearances.

"Of course," she went on in her rapid fashion, "we all ought to be very melancholy and mournful, but I am pagan enough to claim life for joy, not for gloom. And after all, it is a contradiction to grieve for what we are assured is a better and a happier life than earth's. Uncle told me once that he looked upon Death as merely going out into a dark passage and closing the door behind one. We don't quite know where the passage may lead, but there may be a light and a guide waiting for us. Ronnie, have you heard half the stories and traditions of this old Abbey? They say it's haunted. There's one special room that—gracious! what's the matter? You look as if you were going to faint."

"It's nothing," muttered her cousin, passing his hand quickly over his damp brow. "A little giddiness. I haven't quite got over that—accident."

"Oh! how stupid of me to forget! But—what's the matter with your hand, Ronnie?"

"My hand?" He gazed stupidly at his right hand as it lay on his knee. "Oh, you

THE POINTING FINGER

mean that scar? It was a wound—a spear thrust. It has left the muscles contracted, as you see. That's why my handwriting is different. Sometimes I can hardly hold a pen."

"Poor fellow!" said Lady Sue compassionately. "But how all this bears out what I said! No family should permit the heirs of its house to go forth on these wild-goose or wild-beast expeditions. Supposing you had been killed, now?"

"Yes?" he said, with a harsh, sudden laugh. "Supposing I had?"

Her face had grown very grave. Her eyes rested on him with a curious intentness.

"It would have been a pity," she said. "I for one heartily detest Jasper Mallory. And you know you always hated him. By the way, wasn't he here for the funeral?"

"No," said Lady Anne. "He was informed, of course, but he was with his regiment in Ireland. He wrote saying he could not get leave."

"I suppose he didn't wish to," said Lady Sue, shrugging her graceful shoulders. "Do you feel better now, Ronnie?" she asked abruptly.

THE POINTING FINGER

"Yes, oh yes, thank you," said the young Earl quickly. "It was only a spasm."

"What with wounds and fevers and spasms, I should advise you to go up to town and see a doctor," said his cousin. "I'm sure if I lived a month in this ghostly old place I should be ill or out of my senses."

"Nonsense, my dear," said the old lawyer. "The Abbey is no worse a place to live in than Haughton Close, or—or, for the matter of that, St. James's Square."

"We seem to have a monopoly of undesirable residences," said Lady Sue flippantly. "What a pity a family has to be saddled with traditions! Now if only we had a good fire or an earthquake, we could get rid of these gloomy old places and build up something bright and modern. There's a suggestion, Ronnie. Accidental incendiarism. Are you insured? Of course you are. I suppose that makes a difference. It would be criminal or something. Fancy, you a criminal! The first Earl of Edensore to suffer imprisonment for legal offences. I'd come and see you in your cell. Bring you some food and a bottle of wine, and bribe

THE POINTING FINGER

the gaoler, and—but what is the matter ? You look ill again.”

| But he declared himself perfectly well, though the hand that held his coffee-cup shook like a leaf, and he was unable to raise it to his lips.

“ Perhaps you have a touch of fever on you,” said the old lawyer sympathetically. “ I should advise a hot bath and bed.”

“ Have you your old room ? ” asked Lady Sue suddenly.

“ Of course,” said her mother. “ We kept it in readiness after the first cablegram. By the way, why did you not answer it, Ronnie ? ”

He looked somewhat confused. “ I sent off a message from Cape Town. Didn’t you get it ? ”

“ No,” said his aunt.

“ You can’t trust those Kaffir boys,” he said angrily. “ I was in great haste. There was barely time to catch the steamer.”

“ But when you reached Plymouth ? ” said Lady Sue.

“ I only thought of getting here in time.”

A momentary silence fell upon the little group. It was broken at last by Lady Sue.

THE POINTING FINGER

"Wasn't poor old Kezia delighted?" she asked suddenly. "She used to say she'd never live to see you back again. She had the strangest ideas about this last expedition. You remember her visions? Well, her latest was that she saw you sitting by a camp fire, surrounded by savages. Mother wrote me that——"

"She would persist that you had joined the tribes, or whatever it was," interposed Lady Anne. "The vision was always the same. Your skin was dark. You were dressed in native garb. You had lost all memory of home."

"What did she say when you put her prophesying to shame?" asked Lady Sue.

"I haven't seen her—yet," he answered evasively.

"What!—a whole week in the house and not paid a visit to Kezia. Why, she'll never forgive you!"

"He has had so much to do—so many calls on his time," said her mother.

"I'll see her to-morrow," said Lord Edensore.

"Let me go with you, Ronnie. I'd love to hear what she says."

THE POINTING FINGER

"Of course," said her cousin. "I—I can't think why I should have been so neglectful."

"It certainly isn't like you! Why, your first visit after you came home was always to the Monk's turret."

The young Earl's eyes turned suddenly to the picture on the wall. Then dropped as suddenly. "Why do we sit in this room?" he asked. "It is so gloomy and dismal."

"It was your father's favourite room, you know. And almost all the others are shut up. But if you wish——"

"You surely wouldn't prefer the drawing-room!" exclaimed Lady Sue. "That would make even a Mark Tapley dismal! The only cheerful room is mother's boudoir. I told you this place would give anyone the horrors. I never stayed here if I could help it. Mother said she might as well have been without a daughter! You didn't set a very good example either. You were as little enamoured of the family seat as I."

"True," answered her cousin. "England, and its country, and its great houses seem to me inexpressibly dreary. One misses the sky, the space, the generous sunlight!"

THE POINTING FINGER

"But it's the best land after all," said Mr. Bryantson. "The only land that expresses the meaning of 'Home.'"

There was another space of silence. It was broken by the clock on the mantelpiece striking the hour. Ten o'clock. Lady Anne rose suddenly from her chair.

"We will leave you two men to your smoke and yourselves," she said. "I confess to feeling tired, and Sue has had a long, tedious journey."

Lady Sue raised herself languidly. "I'm not tired," she said. "But I daresay these poor things are longing for a smoke and a chat."

"I return to town to-morrow, you know," said the old lawyer. "I cannot spare any more time away from business."

"To-morrow!" exclaimed Lady Sue.

"Yes. Everything here is in train. Whatever is not settled can be done by correspondence."

"That will delight Ronnie," she said mockingly. "He is the worst and laziest correspondent I have ever come across."

"Ah! he will change all that. He has a more important place in the world now."

THE POINTING FINGER

They were all standing on the rug before the fire. The leaping flames threw ruddy reflections on their faces ; on Lady Anne's placid features ; on Lady Sue's glorious vivid beauty ; on the old lawyer's grizzled locks, and on Lord Edensore's pale face and down-cast eyes. Then Lady Anne held out her hand to her nephew and gave her usual good-night kiss.

Lady Sue followed her mother's example as far as the handshake went. But ere she relinquished her clasp she suddenly seized his wrist, and turned the scarred and wounded right hand upwards to the light.

" Poor Ronnie ! " she murmured. " It must have been dreadful. But it is a strange scar for a spear. It looks more like a sword cut."

" What should you know about savage weapons ? " he answered mockingly. " Their use, or abuse, or accidents of usage."

He released his hand from her clasp with a hurried nervous gesture. Then stepped forward and opened the door for them. He did not close it at once, but stood watching the graceful figure, the glorious hair which made the gloomy old hall look bright.

THE POINTING FINGER

As Lady Sue passed up the staircase she glanced back and saw him watching her. Half in fun, half in sheer coquetry, she threw him a kiss from her dainty finger tips. It was a natural cousinly action, yet it sent the blood like a flame into his face. As he turned away and let the door fall back a strange look came into his eyes. A look of defiance, of fear, and was it—shame?

Yet of what should the head of the House of Edensore be afraid—or ashamed?

CHAPTER IV

THE smoke and the chat were after all but brief. Lord Edensore's dislike to the library culminated in a fit of restlessness, and he begged the old lawyer to excuse him if he went to his room.

Once there he grew quieter, and looked about with evident relief. Here were no weird paintings, no obsessing fancies. It held many signs of his boyhood's tastes. Prizes he had won at sports, guns, fishing-tackle, trophies of his travels, books mostly of sport or adventure. One or two large comfortable chairs; a huge mahogany wardrobe. A bright fire blazed in the open chimneyplace, and a supply of logs was at hand piled into an old brass coffer. A table stood by the fire. It held a spirit-stand and glasses; a pile of newspapers, a case of cigarettes. The young man looked at it all with appreciative eyes.

THE POINTING FINGER

Comfort and luxury were after all very desirable possessions. He threw off his evening clothes and put on the dressing-gown and slippers laid ready for him. Then drew up a chair before the fire and began to smoke.

"One week," he muttered half aloud. "One week and no mistakes—as yet. It's been easier than I thought. I wonder——"

He looked up and across the room ; hesitated a moment, then rose and went to the wardrobe. He opened one of the doors revealing a row of drawers. He unlocked the top one with a key from his private bunch. It held only a few letters and papers, and an old shabby leather pocket-book. This book he took out and carried back with him to his seat.

He poured himself out a glass of whisky and water, relit his cigarette, and leaning back in the chair began to read it.

Some of the pages were closely covered with minute writing ; some held only detached scraps, memoranda, entries. He studied them all carefully. Almost as carefully as if committing them to memory.

He closed the book at last, and took a long draught of the spirits by his side. Then he

THE POINTING FINGER

replenished the fire and sat looking thoughtfully into its depths.

"Odd that one thing should have no record! I imagined I had every name and person safe enough. I must see her, I suppose. There can't be any danger. Old, bedridden, half blind. No, impossible! But I don't like that 'vision' business. What a weird, ghostly, legend-haunted place this is! I shall be thankful to get out of it. I wonder how long she will remain——?"

His face changed. Again that odd restlessness took possession of him. His eyes grew anxious. He paced the room to and fro.

"Was ever man so tempted?" he muttered. "Was ever situation, or accident, so aptly flung across one's path! Not the wildest invention of fiction could have brought about such a string of coincidences. I am sure even if I told the story here no one would believe it. But why should I? What purpose would it serve? All said and done, I have a better right here than Jasper Mallory. He is a blackguard if ever man was. I at least——"

He broke off abruptly. "How lovely she looked! Shall I ever forget her face as she

THE POINTING FINGER

stood on the staircase looking down and blew that kiss to me ! My God—if that danger is added to the others what will happen ? How she complicates everything ! ”

He came up to the table again. His hand approached the spirit bottle. Then drew back.

“ No,” he said resolutely. “ If ever man needed clear head and cool brain I shall need them now. Besides—no habit should master a man. And I’ve had a lesson.”

He pushed the table aside and began to undress. But before he got into bed he replaced the pocket-book in its drawer, locked it up and put the keys under his pillow.

.

The next day was sunny and bright. Even the gloomy rooms and the gloomy old hall had an aspect of cheerfulness.

Neither Lady Anne nor her daughter appeared at breakfast. Lord Edensore and the old lawyer had it together in a small morning-room looking on the terrace. The meal had been ordered for half-past eight. It was a long drive to the station, and Mr. Bryantson was anxious to leave by the early

THE POINTING FINGER

train. He gave the young lord much good counsel, to which he listened with outward attention, but inward impatience. He possessed a nature too reckless and independent to take kindly to advice. However, he controlled himself well, and the last person to have suspected that it was an effort would have been Benjamin Bryantson himself.

Once the carriage had departed for the station the young man breathed freely. He stood in the great sombre hall, and glanced from point to point of its remarkable beauty of architecture and its collection of treasures and trophies.

"All mine," he thought. "And yet I was freer and happier on the wide *veldt*, under the African sky. How queer life is—ah!"

He stifled the thought in a sudden thrill of delight as he saw the graceful figure of his cousin coming quickly down the wide oak stairs. She nodded a careless "good-morning."

"Has Mr. Bryantson gone? I thought I'd just catch him. Missed? Well, it can't be helped. What are you going to do with yourself, Ronnie?"

THE POINTING FINGER

" Nothing very special. I am quite at your service, if you want anything."

" Oh ! we were going to pay that deferred visit to old Kezia, weren't we ? Let's get it over, and then have a walk. I'd rather ride, but I know Uncle Geoff's old screws ! I hope you'll get some decent horses, Ronnie ? "

" But I thought you disliked the Abbey, that you never came to stay ? "

" No more I did—when you were in South Africa."

" If I thought that my return made any difference I should be tempted to fill the stables with mounts for you."

She laughed gaily. " No ; don't do that. I'm not to be depended on. Ten to one if the horses were there I wouldn't ride. You must get a motor, though. It's the only way to get about in these inaccessible regions. But come, we're wasting time. Let's get to the Monk's turret. By the way, you haven't seen the ghost yet, I suppose ? "

" The ghost ? " he said uneasily.

" Yes, of course ! Don't tell me you've forgotten that. He has to make the acquaint-

THE POINTING FINGER

ance of each new Lord of Edensore. He has been very remiss not to attend to you."

"Have you ever seen it? Do you really believe——"

"My dear Ronnie, not to believe in the ghost of Edensore is to proclaim yourself an alien descendant! Of course I believe in it. I've never seen him. It's a monk, you know; the monk of that horrid picture in the library. But I know uncle had more than one visit from his reverence. And Kezia—well, she'll tell you. She lives in his part of the house. Why—goodness knows! Perhaps being a seeress herself they've something in common!"

Lord Edensore was following her across a wide gallery; then up a flight of stairs. She stopped and knocked softly at a door facing them. It was a heavy door of oak, thickly studded with nails and deeply sunk into the wall. It was opened by a neat-looking maid, who stood aside for them to enter.

The room was octagon-shaped and set in a tower which formed the oldest part of the

THE POINTING FINGER

Abbey. Four narrow windows showed views of the surrounding country. The distant mountains, the sheltered valleys, the dim, dark stretch of ploughed fields.

On an old-fashioned four-post bedstead lay an aged woman. Her eyes were closed. Her silvery hair was covered by a snowy much-frilled cap. Her face was deeply lined and wrinkled. Her clasped and withered hands lay on her breast. She was so still and strange a sight that one could hardly believe she was still clinging to earth and an earthly tenement. Her years numbered a hundred; she had nursed the old Earl of Edensore as well as his son, and belonged to the family almost as much as the house belonged to it.

The two young people stood by the bed, waiting in silence. The neat maid, a Welsh girl, who was her exclusive attendant, had withdrawn to the background.

"Suppose you speak to her, Ronnie," said Lady Sue softly.

"She is asleep, isn't she?" he answered.

At the sound of his voice a quiver passed over the aged woman's face. Her eyelids

THE POINTING FINGER

lifted. The dim purblind eyes turned in the direction of her visitors. Her lips moved.

"Kezia," said Lady Sue, "we have come to see you. Ronnie and I. Did you know he was home ; safe and well again ? "

Then a strange thing happened. The placid face of the old nurse flushed an angry red. Her withered hands trembled and unclasped themselves. She spoke. Her words were as strange as her sudden agitation.

"Be not deceived," she muttered hoarsely. "God is not mocked. . . . Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he . . . also reap."

Lady Sue drew back from the bedside. "Poor soul!" she whispered. "Her wits are wandering."

The young Earl said nothing. He stood there looking down in his youthful strength and manhood at the stricken helplessness of age. His face was set and cold and stern. His cousin wondered at the change in it, at the grey shadow as of pain that once again crept from lip to brow.

"Won't you speak to her, Ronnie?" she repeated.

But he shook his head and turned away.

THE POINTING FINGER

The old woman's eyes were once more closed. The trembling hands were still. She had passed once more into that trance-like condition which was all existence meant for her. Lady Sue moved across the room to where the Welsh girl was sewing. She put a few questions to her. When she looked round the young earl had departed.

She turned again to the aged woman and lightly touched her withered hands. "Kezia," she murmured. "Dear old Kezia, don't you know me? Can't you hear me speaking? Your little Susan that used to plague you so."

Again the old nurse moved. Again her eyes unclosed in that dim vacant stare of sightless age. "Susan," she said faintly, "little Lady Susan. God bless you. The vision held nothing for you. Only the warning—the warning."

"What warning, dear Kezia?" asked the girl. "Ronnie is home and safe in spite of your predictions."

That strange spasm as of anger, helpless in its fettered cell, swept once more across the old nurse's face.

"*Not* home!" she cried, with sudden

THE POINTING FINGER

passion. "Not safe. Be not deceived. I gave the word as I received it. As I received it."

Her voice dropped into faintness—died away into the hushed silence of the room.

CHAPTER V

LADY SUE'S face grew strangely grave and puzzled. She opened her lips as if to speak ; then seemed to change her mind. For a moment or two longer she waited, but the aged creature had fallen again into semi-consciousness.

Her journey's end was near at hand. On the threshold of Life, on the Borderland of Death, the physical sense scarce claims recognition from the spiritual. Both meet on neutral ground ; on neutral ground they part. Kezia, the seeress, was unable to help Kezia, the stricken waiter on life's finality. Yet in a way both were conscious of a dual existence, of dawning mystery, of prophetic power. But the cloud rolled heavily back over the dulled senses and the tired brain. Lady Sue, with the clue to the mystery in her hand, waited vainly on further explanation.

THE POINTING FINGER

She, too, left the room as Ronald had left it. She, too, murmured compassionately of wandering senses ; a mind distraught.

As day followed day the quiet routine of life was resumed ; the domestic machinery worked smoothly on in the well-worn grooves of family service. The young Earl and his lovely cousin were much together. At times she spoke of returning to London, but her mother pleaded for a respite from the fogs and cold cheerlessness of the winter in town. Country visits were out of the question owing to recent bereavement, and there seemed nothing to do save stay on at the Abbey, unless Lady Anne would go abroad. But to this she seemed averse. She was tired of the Riviera ; Egypt was too far ; besides, she hated a sea voyage. The truth was she had lapsed into that easy-going state of mind natural to women of a certain age and temperament. Comfort was necessary to her well-being. The stolid well-understood comfort of an English household ; of servants who knew one's ways, to whom it was not necessary to explain unaccustomed desires in a foreign tongue ! Besides, there was the

THE POINTING FINGER

scheme to be considered. The scheme so long talked of by her brother and herself. The scheme that at last seemed more feasible. For never had Lady Sue shown herself so tractable and easily pleased. She had been used to scoff at and tease her cousin ; to mock at his tastes for sport ; his general uselessness as a future privileged peer of the realm. Now —though she teased, her satire was less merciless. They had long confidential talks. They spoke of duties and responsibilities. She gave him many a wise hint under cover of her pretty mockery. She responded to his graver moods or curt insistence with a sense of surprise, and yet a sense of being overmastered for once. In the common intimacy of home-life they grew to rapid acquaintance, to something that was replacing the old boy and girl freedom, yet something that puzzled Lady Sue.

It was the odd change in the young Earl's moods. The variations, so to say, from warmth to frigid coolness ; from interest to restraint. Formerly her cousin had shown a singular sameness and evenness of temperament. Now he was capricious, uncertain,

THE POINTING FINGER

puzzling. But all this charmed Lady Sue. She had been surfeited with admiration, and was wearied of homage and flattery. The rough strange wooing of her cousin awoke that latent instinct of womanhood which loves mastery even while denying it. His every look was of helpless adoration : yet his actions not unfrequently were a rebellious denial of any softer feeling than their relationship warranted. Sometimes he seemed to avoid her. At others he haunted her presence ; waited on her caprices, followed her dog-like and obedient, suffered her to torment, perplex, scoff, satirise, as she pleased. All of which was not only perplexing but lent a new interest to life and to the dreary monotony of the old Abbey.

There was one subject on which Lady Sue never failed to tease her cousin. It was his dislike of the library. Never would he use it if another room was practicable. He had had a smaller and pleasanter one fitted up for his own use, and there he wrote, read, or interviewed his steward, or smoked for long solitary hours, refusing all company save his own.

THE POINTING FINGER

Such things the old Ronnie would never have done, thought Lady Sue. Such things were at once puzzling and disturbing, as she tried to readjust the cousin she had known two years ago with the cousin who had returned to take up life's responsibilities.

It was odd how seriously disturbed he seemed by some of them. There was the necessity of meeting his Sovereign ; of taking his seat in the House of Lords. All these natural and necessary adjuncts to hereditary dignities only seemed to cause annoyance to the new Earl of Edensore. He was more anxious to postpone than to accept them. The thought of Court dress and Court ceremonies as explained and enlarged upon by his cousin was a thought at once disconcerting and vexatious. Sometimes they battled over the obligation with a warmth that almost touched discourtesy. She upheld what he denied. She fought for that inherent *noblesse oblige* to which ancient rank and lineage give perpetual obedience. To her such claims of descent were imperative. Of Radicals and Liberals the country had surely enough ; it behoved the few remaining lords

THE POINTING FINGER

of feudalism to uphold what they had so long possessed ; to swear, not by right or might, but by might of right.

So had matters progressed. So had Lady Anne watched and smiled in placid patience. So had the dark fierce days of winter been cheered and enlivened, and so unseen and unsuspected and unfeared had Fate spun its web and thrown it where careless feet might find ensnarement, all unsuspecting that there was snare to find.

February had come. A February of mild mood and sunshine. A February prophetic of spring, and apparently its herald. The two cousins rode and walked, and drove, and planned, and found so much that was beautiful and wonderful about the country that no more was said about leaving it. Then suddenly came a stormy petrel of warning.

It was only a small thing—a letter. But the letter pleased no one of the little party who had reckoned on a continuance of the last month's peace. It was a letter addressed to the young Earl, calling him cousin, announcing that the writer, Jasper Mallory, was about to pay a visit to the Abbey.

THE POINTING FINGER

"If he comes direct from Holyhead he will be here to-morrow," said Lady Sue. "Of course he may be going to London first."

They were discussing the letter as they sat in Lady Anne's boudoir over afternoon tea. The room was the only one in the Abbey that possessed feminine charm, in Lord Edensore's opinion. It was decorated and upholstered in an odd but picturesque blending of dull browns and vivid gold. The furniture was genuine Chippendale. The windows looked to the south, showing vale and hillside and river in a wide and splended scenic range.

When the dusk had fallen and lamps were lit, and the ruddy fire flames fell on quaint old china and silver, on the walls and pictures and books, and photographs and plants and flowers and varied knick-knacks, the room was indeed pleasant and picturesque. Lord Edensore loved it above any other in the gloomy old mansion. It annoyed him to think of an intrusion on its peace. And of an intruder heartily disliked by the whole family. Yet the ties of kindred are obligatory, however obnoxious. No one could forbid Jasper Mallory the house because he was disliked, or

THE POINTING FINGER

because his character was decidedly an unpleasant one.

The blemishes on race and pedigree are a delicate subject, and must occasionally be ignored in polite society. Why Jasper Mallory was unpopular no one had actually discovered. But certain it was that he lacked the grace and courtesy and distinction so peculiarly the heritage of the House of Edensore.

He and his cousin, Ronald, had been at the same public school, but after that their ways of life had fallen apart. Jasper, who was four years the senior, entered the army. Ronald's roving and adventurous tastes led him to foreign lands. They had not met for several years, when Jasper signified his intention of a visit. Perhaps that was the reason of the young Earl's strange gravity and absent-mindedness to-night, as he sat with his aunt and Lady Sue in the charming boudoir, and drank cup after cup of tea in almost total silence.

"Well, we shall be two to one, at any rate," went on Lady Sue. "Perhaps if we join forces he won't stop long. How I hope it! Of course, it sounds inhospitable and all that, but

THE POINTING FINGER

then why should one cultivate unselfishness to a harmful extent? Mother dear, we shall hand Jasper over to you. You would be drawn and quartered for anyone's good, I know. Ronnie, I hope you'll take the greatest care of yourself. It would be horrid to have Jasper as Earl of Edensore. I feel a selfish interest in your well-being. You know the old adage—

‘Seventh, eighth, and one before,
Cursed be name of Edensore;
Ninth and tenth and never more
Falls the curse on Edensore.’

Which are you, Ronnie? Ninth, isn't it?”

He flushed uncomfortably. “I believe so. But there are queer records in the family, as you know.”

“So there are in all old families. The peerage would bear a re-translation.”

“My *dear* Sue,” murmured Lady Anne rebukingly.

“My *dear* mother,” mimicked her daughter. “You look as shocked as if I had overthrown one of your pet theories. And Ronnie is absolutely blushing. What have I said? Trodden on delicate ground? Unearthed a family skeleton? Well, after all, even royal

THE POINTING FINGER

houses have their skeletons, and their secrets, and their walking ghosts. What harm in my allusion ? ”

There was a moment's uncomfortable silence. Neither her mother nor her cousin seemed desirous of taking up the gauntlet she had thrown down. Their reticence seemed to annoy Lady Sue. She often affected a knowledge of things good and evil ; mocked at the good, and exaggerated the evil. It all depended on her mood.

“ Kezia told me all about the foreign lady long ago,” she went on daringly. “ At least she related it as a vision, and I dotted the ‘ i’s ’ and crossed the ‘ t’s. ’ ”

Lord Edensore put down his cup with some haste.

“ It is hardly a subject for discussion.”

“ Blame Jasper Mallory for that. He unearthed more particulars than anyone else. He even told me once that he had traced her to——”

“ Sue ! ” interposed her mother sternly. “ I must insist on your dropping the subject. It is most unsuitable ; unfit——”

“ And unpleasant,” she interrupted. “ Of

THE POINTING FINGER

course I know that. Skeletons are unpleasant. So are secrets and mysteries. I can't tell why, but Jasper Mallory always gives me the idea of a ghost digging up secrets and mysteries, and burrowing in graveyards. Talking of graveyards, what room will you give him, Ronnie?"

"I—I have not thought about it. Suppose you suggest."

She sprang to her feet. "Oh, let him have the haunted room in the west gallery. He hates it. I wish to goodness the Monk would take it into his head to appear. It might shorten his stay. And it's really about time for one of his visitations, isn't it, mother?"

Lady Anne looked helplessly at her wilful daughter. She seemed to hold a monopoly of disagreeable subjects.

"I know nothing about such nonsense. In all the years I have visited or lived here I have never seen any such apparition as you speak of."

"Because you're so good," said Lady Sue. "The monk was a wicked monk, and he only shows himself to the wicked members of the family. Decidedly it's Jasper's turn. Do

THE POINTING FINGER

give him the haunted room, Ronnie. I'll speak to Mrs. Brock, shall I ? "

But Lord Edensore looked inquiringly at his aunt. " I wish you would decide for me," he said.

It was Lady Anne's turn for indecision. In any sort of crisis she was helpless. Her daughter had long recognised that fact. Occasionally, as in the present instance, she took advantage of it.

" Leave it all to me," she said. " There can be a fire lit to-night as a preliminary. And if he objects we must say there isn't another habitable room at present. He might suggest sharing yours, Ronnie, but if I know anything of you——"

" Indeed, no ! " exclaimed her cousin impatiently.

" I thought you'd say that. Of course by all rules and laws of precedent you should be lodged in the state bedroom. But Mrs. Brock says you refuse to be moved. How your boyhood's tastes cling to you ! You always hated forms and ceremonies and show ! "

" So did his father," said Lady Anne.

THE POINTING FINGER

Sudden tears filled her eyes. She and the old Earl had always been devoted to one another.

Lord Edensore was leaning with one elbow on the mantelpiece looking down into the fire. He made no reply. Lady Sue rose from her chair and left the room.

At sound of the closing door Ronald looked up. "Do you think she meant that about the room?" he asked Lady Anne.

"I am sure she did. It is just the sort of wilful prank she delights in playing. Of course you can interfere if you wish."

"No," he said slowly. "I don't wish. Let it be as Fate chooses."

"Fate?" echoed Lady Anne wonderingly. "My dear boy, you don't surely call a girl's whim by such a name?"

"Not an ordinary girl's whim," he said. "But Sue's—that is different."

Lady Anne sighed softly. "She rules us all. I wish sometimes a stronger power would rule and control her. But I fear——"

What she feared she had no opportunity of saying, for the sudden deep clanging of

THE POINTING FINGER

the entrance bell interrupted her. The young Earl turned sharply. "Who can it be? Surely not—he—already?"

"Impossible!" said Lady Anne. "The letter said to-morrow. Did you look at the date?"

"No." He advanced and took up the envelope from the table where it lay. He drew out the letter again. "It is dated the day before yesterday. It must have been delayed. Perhaps after all——"

There came a noise of steps, voices, confusion. The door of the boudoir was thrown suddenly open. A footman announced—

"Captain Mallory."

CHAPTER VI

THE man who entered upon this announcement looked with a sort of malicious pleasure at the two occupants of the room.

"You got my letter, Aunt Anne?" he said, as he held out his hand. "Ah, Ronald, how are you? So sorry I could not be here in time. My poor uncle! So you are the head of the family now. Accept my—condolences."

He spoke with a certain insolence that brought the hot blood to the young Earl's face. The glances exchanged between Jasper and himself were not of a friendly type. Their cool handshake was a thing of necessity, not of welcome.

"We did not expect you till to-morrow," he said. "You have arrived almost on the heels of your letter."

"Have I? I suppose I ought to apologise.

THE POINTING FINGER

I'm sure if I spoke of anxiety for reunion, of an earnest desire to see you all——”

He glanced round the room. “Where is Sue?” he asked. “Isn't she staying here?”

“Yes,” said Lady Anne. “She will be back in a moment. She merely went to give orders for preparing your room. May I offer you some tea?”

“I'd prefer a brandy and soda. I'm tired and thirsty. We had a devil of a passage. Certainly that Irish Channel would take a lot of beating.”

He drew a chair close up to the fire, and sat down, holding out his hands to the blaze. Lord Edensore's glance rested on them. They were white, thin, long hands, with fingers that curved at the tips like the talons of a bird. Ronald felt that if he disliked the face with its pallor, its red lips, its small shifty eyes, he disliked those hands even more. Nature had written treachery, cunning, unscrupulousness over all this man. Even as some personalities attract at first sight, so do others repel. Jasper Mallory fell into the latter class. He was smiling in an odd covert fashion as he

THE POINTING FINGER

warmed those cruel-looking hands of his. His cousin had turned away to give the necessary orders for refreshment. Lady Anne was looking nervous and uncomfortable and wishing her daughter would return. A footman brought in the spirit-stand and syphon and removed the tea-tray. Jasper helped himself liberally, and went back to the fire with his glass in his hand.

"So you just escaped the war," he said to Ronald. "How fortunate!"

That sneer set every nerve tingling. With an effort the young man answered, "You seem equally fortunate yourself. I heard your regiment was not going to the front."

"That's true enough. Not but what I wouldn't rather be in Africa than Ireland any day. Of all the awful, God-forsaken holes! Well, one has to put up with the beastly service, I suppose. I'm thinking of giving it up, though."

"What—now? With war at our gates!"

"Oh! Honour and Glory's all very fine, but one owes a duty to oneself, and one's—expectations."

His glance was full of meaning and of

THE POINTING FINGER

malice. It spoke clearly as any words a covert envy of his cousin's position ; a hidden hope that chance or accident might yet favour his own rights of succession.

" So you got back all right ? " he went on presently. " How about that brush with the tribe in Central Africa ? A near shave, eh ? "

Ronald started and gazed blankly at his cousin. " How did you hear of that ? "

Jasper took a gulp at his glass. " How ? Oh ! by accident, of course. A man I know was out there at the time. He wrote and told me."

" I see," said Lord Edensore curtly. " Well, you learnt the story ? "

" Not the sequel. How did you escape ? "

" By dint of keeping my wits about me ; and of being a good shot."

" Ronnie has had terrible adventures," interposed Lady Anne. " I think he must possess a charmed life. From all I have heard I—oh—here is Sue ! "

That lovely young person had dashed into the room unceremoniously as an interruption.

THE POINTING FINGER

She looked coldly at the new arrival. He rose and put down his glass, and came forward to greet her.

"Well, Jasper," she said coolly. "I see you are as averse to truth as ever. Why did you say Thursday if you meant Wednesday?"

She gave him her finger tips and withdrew them almost at his touch. His eyes devoured her face, her mutinous defiant beauty. "You don't say I'm welcome, Sue. I haven't seen you for——"

"Oh—never mind that!" she said pettishly. "It's a year, I believe. And we're none of us mad, or married, or dead."

She broke off abruptly. "Oh! I beg your pardon, Ronnie. How thoughtless I am! You know I didn't mean it."

He smiled a little sadly. "Of course. Don't worry yourself."

"Sue is terribly inconsequent," said her mother rebukingly. "She comes out with the first thing in her head, regardless of how she hurts people's feelings."

"Sue acknowledges the soft impeachment. Well, Jasper, how is it you're not off to the

THE POINTING FINGER

front ? Or perhaps you are, and have come to bid us a fond farewell."

"No. You're quite out of it," said Mallory sulkily. "We've got to stick in Ireland. I've managed a week's leave. That's all."

"Won't you volunteer, or exchange ?"

"How anxious you are ! Yet you don't often trouble yourself about my concerns."

"Probably because they lack interest. Well, how did you think Ronnie was looking ?"

"Much as usual. A trifle thinner and—older."

"He does look older. I said so. That comes of such an adventurous life. It's fine while it lasts, but as with racing it's the pace that kills. But there's the dressing-bell. I'm so sorry your room isn't ready. We didn't expect you till to-morrow. But it will be all straight by bedtime. Only you'll have to use Ronnie's dressing-room to-night."

"Sorry to put you out," answered Mallory. "That letter seems kind of confused, as the Yanks say. Where is it ? How did I come to date it wrongly ?"

Lady Anne held it out. He glanced at the date. "Yes, my carelessness. Well, you

THE POINTING FINGER

must excuse. Hope I shan't inconvenience Ronald very much ? ”

“ Not at all. I can dress in my bedroom. I'll tell Richards to wait on you,” said his cousin.

He turned and left the room. Jasper Mallory stood silent for a moment. A puzzled expression on his face.

“ What is it ? ” he said, suddenly turning to Lady Anne. “ He is different somehow from the old Ronnie, and yet I can't place the difference.”

“ He's changed, of course,” said Lady Anne. “ He felt his father's death very much. And then he's had a lot of worry and anxiety over business matters.”

“ The Ronald who left for Africa was a light-hearted boy,” said Lady Sue. “ This Ronald has faced death and danger, and learnt the meaning of responsibility. Also he is the head of the house. You seem to forget that.”

“ No,” said Mallory, with that evil sneer of his disfiguring his face. “ I don't forget it any more than—yourself.”

She flushed to her temples. Her lips parted

THE POINTING FINGER

as if to speak. But Lady Anne, with a pre-science of danger, rose abruptly.

"I must go and dress for dinner," she said. "Come, Sue. Jasper will excuse us, I'm sure."

He opened the door for them. Lady Sue passed him; her proud head held high; her lips mutinous and scornful. As clear as spoken words was the meaning of both look and manner. "I hate you," said her rebellious heart, and Jasper Mallory instinctively recognised the hatred and the cause.

Dinner was a dull affair that evening. The little party seemed ill at ease. Restraint shackled the conversation, and confined it to mere commonplace or mere personalities. It was a relief to all when the meal was over.

Lady Anne and her daughter went as usual to the young Earl's study in preference to the cold, draughty hall, or the dreary library.

They sipped their coffee and talked guardedly of the visitor; of the plainly revealed animosity he bore to Ronald; of his lack of spirit in shirking an obvious duty.

"I'm sure he had an object in coming here," said Lady Sue. "And in coming as he did;

THE POINTING FINGER

taking us by surprise. Well, I hope he'll sleep sound, and have pleasant dreams, I'm sure."

"I hope he doesn't drink as heavily as he used to do," murmured Lady Anne. "There have been some very unpleasant scenes here at times."

The girl's lips curled scornfully. "I wish he'd drink himself to death! The family wouldn't suffer."

"Sue," said her mother, "since you are always talking about the family, its honour, its fortunes, hasn't it occurred to you how easily you might assist both?"

Lady Sue looked up half surprised. Then she blushed. "I know what you mean, of course. I used to hate the idea."

"But now—since he has returned?"

"He is changed—different in many ways. But for all that——"

She paused and looked thoughtfully into the fire. "I think he only looks upon me in the same brotherly-sisterly way we've always gone on looking at each other."

Lady Anne shook her head. "I am older than you. I have seen more of the world. I

THE POINTING FINGER

think Ronald loves you as devotedly as ever man loved woman."

The girl moved impatiently. "Then let matters alone, mother. I don't want to spoil the illusion of being loved and wooed for myself. I'm no romantic chit of sixteen. I, too, know the world and life. Let things work out their own way. If I thought you gave a hint to him, or if he was trying to get round you, I'd——" She rose abruptly and set down her coffee-cup. "Never mind what I'd do. But I'm very sure if Jasper Mallory could murder one or other of us, he'd do it without a qualm of conscience."

"Sue!" exclaimed Lady Anne, inexpressibly shocked.

"Oh, I know it sounds very horrible and melodramatic, and all that. But I feel his hatred of Ronnie even as I feel his odious fancy for myself. There—we've said enough. I'm almost sorry I'm here just now. It would have been better had I left before——"

"Here they come," said Lady Anne warningly. "My dear, do be careful what you say and do. After all, it's only for a few days."

"Thank goodness for that!" said Lady Sue.

THE POINTING FINGER

"If I thought——" But the opening of the door stayed further expression of her opinion.

Neither of the two young men looked as if the company of the other had proved an unmixed pleasure. Jasper Mallory had drunk just enough wine to make him disagreeable. And that mood was one with which both Lady Anne and her daughter were familiar. He was boastful and insolent and captious. He asked innumerable questions and suggested all sorts of schemes for what he called "improving the old dungeon." He seemed indifferent as to whether he hurt people's feelings or offended their prejudices. Altogether the evening was singularly unpleasant, and both Lady Sue and Ronald wished the intruder anywhere but where he had chosen to invite himself.

The climax came when he asked about his room, and Lady Sue told him the red chamber in the west gallery had been made ready for him.

He turned a sickly white, and looked at her as if doubtful of her being in earnest.

"But why——" he stammered, "why that room? You know I don't like that side of the house."

THE POINTING FINGER

"I was not aware of your tastes on the subject," said his cousin. "The other rooms are occupied or under repair. As you gave such short notice you mustn't blame Mrs. Brock for not being prepared. Mr. Bryantson had been occupying the red room, so it was aired, and could soon be made ready. What is your objection?"

"It is cold and draughty and out of the way."

Lady Sue laughed. "Oh, well, it has been warmed and screened, and if you want company I daresay Richards would sleep in the next room. But I thought soldiers feared nothing—even draughts and loneliness."

"Feared? Who said I feared?" he blustered. "I only meant it was a strange choice. Last time I was here——"

"You had Ronnie's room, I know," said Lady Anne. "But he is occupying it now."

"I should have thought you'd have taken the usual rooms, Ronald," Jasper said, turning to his cousin.

"That remark is not in the best possible taste," answered the young Earl. "It is little more than a month since my—since your

THE POINTING FINGER

uncle died. I have no fancy for those great gloomy state chambers. Their associations are too melancholy."

"Are you afraid of the ghost paying you a visit, Jasper?" teased Lady Sue. "You needn't be, you know. It is only the direct line of the family that he honours."

Jasper Mallory made no reply. He was busy lighting a cigarette. When he spoke at last it was to ask what they did with themselves in the evening. Did no one play "nap" or bridge? Finally cards were laid out, and he offered to teach Ronald the game. The others played it well. The interest aroused by learning and playing kept them all engrossed, and they sat up later than usual. Finally Lady Anne gave the signal for retiring, and the two young men were left alone.

It annoyed Ronald to see how much his cousin drank, and to be chaffed for his own temperance. He had never played host to so obnoxious a guest, and his courtesy was put to a strain that threatened to break it down more than once.

He rose at last; his temper was failing. "I'll go to bed, if you'll excuse me," he said.

THE POINTING FINGER

" You know your way here well enough to find your room when you feel inclined to follow my example."

" Know my—way," hiccoughed Mallory. " Courshe I do. But it's a shame to put me in the haunted room. You come there too, and k-keep me com-company—eh ? "

" Certainly not," said Ronald sternly. " If I could find a congenial sot like yourself I'd send him to you. But I fear we don't run to such roysterers in this part of the world."

Jasper Mallory raised his dulled eyes to his cousin's angry face.

" Oh, go 'long, old sober-sides," he muttered. " You're a bigger prig than ever. But take c-care—. You're not out of the wood—yet."

" What do you mean ? " asked Ronald sharply.

" I mean just what I shay. You come back, but who knows—knowsh——"

" The devil take you for a drunken fool," said Ronald savagely. " It will be a sorry day for us if ever an Edensore makes place for—a Mallory."

He shut the door and crossed the dim gloom of the hall to the staircase. Then a thought

THE POINTING FINGER

struck him. He rang the bell for Richards, the second footman. He told him to give a look in presently at Captain Mallory. "I expect you'll have to help him to bed," he added.

"Oh! we're used to that, my lord," said the man, smiling. "It won't be the first time by a good many, as you ought to know."

"He seems to dislike that room in the west gallery," continued Lord Edensore. "But there's no other he could have for to-night?"

"No, my lord. Mrs. Brock had it made all comfortable. I'm sure there's no reason for the captain objecting."

The young Earl paused for a moment. "I—I suppose you've never seen—anything, Richards, have you?"

"Seen—what, my lord?"

The honest good-humoured face of the young man expressed surprise.

"The ghost? The figure of the monk who haunts that part of the house?"

Richards shook his head. "No, my lord; nor yet have any of us. There'd have been something said in the servants' hall if we had."

"But you've heard, of course?"

THE POINTING FINGER

" Oh, well, my lord, there's been stories told and things said. For my part, I don't hold with such fancies. I don't believe folks as has been dead and buried for scores of years can come out o' their graves worrying and troubling other folk. 'Tain't probable now, is it, my lord ? "

" I should say not," answered Lord Edensore thoughtfully. " Mrs. Brock has never seen this apparition, has she ? "

" Not that I've ever heard tell of, my lord."

" Well, good-night, Richards," said the young Earl. " I'll dispense with your services to-night in favour of Captain Mallory."

He ran quickly up the stairs and crossed the gallery to his own room. The footman with a somewhat disgusted expression betook himself to the escort duty required on behalf of the unpopular visitor.

CHAPTER VII

RONALD troubled himself no further. He closed and locked his door, and then with a sigh of relief lit a cigarette and sat down before the fire to smoke and think.

His thoughts seemed troubled ones. His face looked grave and sad and perplexed. They ran on strange lines those thoughts. For it is odd how a man may jest with Fate and wake to find the jest is deadly earnest, and his life in peril and his heart and will no longer his own. Odd disjointed words fell from the young man's lips; words that seemed out of keeping with his fortunes and his honours.

"It was a mad scheme," he muttered. "And God knows how it will end now. All these years and nothing to make life sweet to me, and then—this hope. All born of a careless word. A life saved; a secret learnt.

THE POINTING FINGER

Then—the temptation and the chance. It looked so possible, so easy. And in a way I but claimed my rights from those who had wronged me. No one has guessed, or knows. Even this drunken sot thinks I am the real Ronald. And Sue—oh ! if it were not for her how easy and simple the whole thing would be ! Yet, if she knew the truth——”

His cigarette had gone out. He tossed it savagely aside, and rose and paced the room.

“Such a simple thing to spoil an admirable scheme,” he said, with a harsh laugh. “Only a girl’s face, a girl’s smile, and the whole world altered for one ! I—who mocked at soft-heartedness ; to whom my own will and purpose meant everything. I to turn coward because—because——”

He halted abruptly. He was in front of the mirror, and the mirror showed him his face and its expression.

He stood quite still for a moment and with a merciless persistence analysed every feature.

“There were two sons of one sire,” he said, with sudden mockery. “And the one claimed heritage and birthright, and the other was a scamp and a wanderer on the face of the

THE POINTING FINGER

earth. Yet Fate ordained that they should meet, and meeting learn to know each of the other. And never were twin-born mortals more alike than those two brothers who yet bore no acknowledged brotherhood. It makes a pretty story. What would my Lady Sue say to it if she heard it ? ”

He turned away from the mirror. “ After all, it’s a choice of evils : I make a better head of the family than that blackguard below stairs. And if Sue——”

The blood rushed to his temples. He stood quite still in an attitude of listening. What was that ? . . . A cry, a shriek, the sound of clashing doors !

He threw open his own and waited—listening. The house was all in darkness. The great hall looked only a dim dark well ; a void space in the blackness and mystery of the night.

But sounds reached him as he stood there. Scuffling feet ; a yell of terror. Then a light flashed across the darkness. The young man rushed to the staircase and saw Jasper Mallory clad only in shirt and trousers stumbling and falling across the hall in a vain

THE POINTING FINGER

endeavour to flee from some pursuing or terrifying object.

Following him was the footman, Richards, carrying a light. Thinking it was but a piece of drunken folly the young Earl stood where he was, watching the frantic stumbles and gestures of his cousin, and the efforts of Richards to pacify him.

"I tell you I saw it! I saw it!" yelled Mallory, "pointing at me straight from the wall. Let me get away, out of this d——d house! Ugh!"

He stumbled to the foot of the staircase and sat on the last stair shivering and groaning and glancing from side to side. A pitiable object of moral cowardice.

Ronald ran lightly down to the hall and paused just above him.

"What's the matter?" he exclaimed. "Why are you rousing the house at this time of night?"

Jasper rose and clutched the young Earl's arm with a frantic force. "Oh! Ronnie, I'm cursed! I saw it—the sign; the Pointing Finger!"

"For heaven's sake pull yourself together

THE POINTING FINGER

and be a man!" cried Ronald angrily. "You've been drinking till your brain is all at sixes and sevens. What happened, Richards?" he asked sternly.

"Well, my lord, the captain would insist on sleeping in the library, on the couch, and I thought it best to let him have his way. He was sound off as I thought, and I was sitting in the arm-chair reading the newspaper. I don't know if I fell into a doze. It seemed but a few minutes when the captain gave a yell that—that would have woke the dead! And he was sitting up all of a sweat, so to say, and shaking, as he's shaking now, and he swore that the hand in the picture had come out of the frame and touched him! I tried to persuade him it was a dream, but you see for yourself, my lord, it was of no use."

"A dream—it was no dream!" cried Mallory, passing one shaking hand over his damp brow. "As sure as I live, I woke up and felt the hand, and there was that cursed face smiling at me and the finger—that fatal finger. Ronnie, I'm a doomed man. That finger points always to death or disaster."

THE POINTING FINGER

I—oh ! if I thought it was only a dream I'd give up that cursed drink. I'd live a better life. As God hears me I would ! ”

He was evidently distraught. Babbling, shivering, moaning, he was a living picture of abject cowardice. Ronald could hardly help pitying him. His face was livid ; his eyes almost starting out of his head ; his sleek black hair was tumbled loosely about his damp forehead. The shock, whatever it was, had sobered him. But his distraught senses were unable to come to his assistance. The man's real nature stood sharply and cruelly defined in this moment. All defences of speech and subterfuge failed him. He was only a coward clinging to life and terrified of the unknown. Ronald wondered what to do with him. He had refused to sleep in the room prepared. It was useless to persuade him to go there. The library was equally impossible. There remained only Ronald's own room.

He took hasty counsel with Richards, and made a suggestion. Mallory was now whimpering and trembling and passive. Between them they got him upstairs and into

THE POINTING FINGER

the chair by the fire lately occupied by the young Earl. There he cowered in shivering misery while Richards hastily threw some rugs and cushions on the couch in the adjoining dressing-room. Ronald had decided to sleep there. With some difficulty they got the terrified man to bed. Once his head touched the pillow he fell asleep—the deep sodden sleep of the inebriate whose faculties are temporarily paralysed. Then Ronald dismissed the man to his own quarters, and after making up the fire retired to the dressing-room and threw himself down on the couch.

He felt no inclination to sleep. But equally he did not care about sitting up in the same room with the wretched sot who, for him at least, bore no claims to patience or condonation.

He wondered if the noise had reached the wing of the great house occupied by Lady Anne and her daughter. At least, they had made no sign. He hoped they had been undisturbed. The scene had disgusted and unnerved him, and driven sleep away. He tossed from side to side, he tried all methods of stilling his brain's uneasy fancies and

THE POINTING FINGER

its restless wanderings into channels mystical and inexplicable.

He remembered his own fancy regarding that picture; his own horror of that room. There was nothing to account for it, nothing to explain it. Yet the fact remained. When he sat there he found himself unable to do work or compose his mind by any ordinary methods. Was there, after all, something in occult science—some communicating channel between the world seen and the world unseen? Had the crime of the House of Edensore been unexpiated, and was its penalty to fall upon each successor? If so——

He started suddenly and sat bolt upright in that tossed and tumbled couch. A thought—a memory had flashed across his brain. What was it Lady Sue had said: "The ghost only appears to a direct descendant." Did the same rule apply to the sign of the Pointing Finger? That terrifying, prophetic signal of which he himself had been a witness—that prophetic warning which was accountable for Jasper Mallory's terror and collapse.

He sat there awed and shaken by a sudden sense of danger. Through the communicating

THE POINTING FINGER

door the red glow of the fire shone warmly. The heavy breathing of the sleeping man reached his ears. With an effort he recalled himself to common sense and everyday existence. With an effort he lay back and closed his eyes. With an effort he forced his thoughts into commonplace channels and sought for sleep.

"I have resolved to let the thing work itself out," he muttered doggedly. "It must—it shall. If Jasper Mallory is my enemy, none the less am I his. Fate must have its will of us!"

Meanwhile Jasper Mallory slept himself sober, and woke suddenly to the fact of sunshine and his surroundings. He sat up and looked about him.

"Ronnie's room! How did I come here?"

His eyes fell on the toilet glass opposite the bed. He saw he was still in the white shirt of the previous evening. He tried to collect his thoughts and remember how such things had come about. But his head ached intolerably, and his throat was parched and

THE POINTING FINGER

dry. With a stifled groan he sank back and closed his eyes.

" If I am here, where is Ronnie ? "

Then a light burst upon his confused memories. He remembered this terror, his flight, his appeal to his cousin.

He felt ashamed and resentful as he thought of it all. How could he have been such an infernal ass! How could he have put into the hand of that hated interloper a weapon powerful for his own wounding, for his own shame!

He opened his eyes again, wondering what was the time. His watch lay on a small table by the bedside. He took it up. Seven o'clock. Still early. Should he go to sleep or—— His glance fell now on the half-open door. Was Ronald there? Had he actually been unselfish enough to put himself to such discomfort?

An odd smile twisted his fevered lips. Very cautiously and quietly he slipped out of bed and stole across the room. He peered through the aperture, and saw Ronald lying asleep on the couch. His arms were folded across his chest. The expression of the handsome

THE POINTING FINGER

young face was the placid untroubled expression that deep slumber gives. For a moment or two those evil eyes looked at the unconscious sleeper. For a moment or two the clenched hand raised itself with fierce longing, as if the desire to choke out life from a detested foe overwhelmed prudence and restraint. Then the coward instinct replaced the vindictive one.

"There are other means," muttered the watcher. "Violence is always more or less unsafe. He escaped me in Africa. Will he escape me—here?"

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN Ronald awoke he found that Jasper Mallory had vacated his room.

He did not appear till they were all seated at the breakfast-table. Then he sauntered in with all the *sang-froid* and indifference of perfect innocence. But though he could command his manners and his speech, his pallid face and bloodshot eyes and shaking hands told a story of their own.

"Well, how did you sleep?" asked Lady Sue mischievously.

"Splendidly," he answered.

"Oh! then you're satisfied with your quarters?"

"Quite. It is better to fight down a prejudice than to yield to it. Any letters?" he asked by way of changing the subject.

"The post isn't in yet," said Lady Anne.
"Tea or coffee, Jasper?"

THE POINTING FINGER

"Oh, tea, please. Coffee is a beverage to be avoided in England. No one knows how to make it."

He had merely nodded to Ronald as he took his place. Lady Sue was not surprised. The two young men had never been very cordial to one another. She did her best to talk and enliven the situation, but it was not easy work. The new Earl was absent-minded and indifferent, and Jasper Mallory's witticisms were in the worst possible taste.

When the question of the day's amusement was brought into discussion there was a new difficulty to surmount. She and Ronald had planned a ride to a place some ten miles distant. A queer little village, boasting an equally queer little inn. They had proposed lunching at the inn, and returning late in the afternoon. This had been the project before the arrival of Mallory's letter. Now they spoke of the plan with a certain hesitancy. Would the visitor fall in with it, or had he any scheme of his own?

The visitor had a scheme. He was not inclined to ride. Besides, the roads were all vile and rough in that district. He preferred

THE POINTING FINGER

to "potter about." Have a look round the old place ; chat with old friends.

The announcement surprised his cousins. Lady Sue, despite relief at so agreeable a decision, was puzzled to think why he should decide upon such a method of spending his time. As for "old friends," she knew well enough that Jasper was most unpopular amongst tenants and gamekeepers and the neighbourhood generally. Still—he was only responsible to himself. And she and Ronnie would have the best part of the day together.

As soon as the horses were out of sight Jasper Mallory rang the bell and asked for the housekeeper. She appeared in answer to his summons ; prim, stiff, stately. His "ways" and goings-on had been well discussed in the servants' hall. He was as unpopular there as elsewhere. Mrs. Brock specially disliked him.

He greeted her familiarly, with every appearance of cordiality. But her stiff politeness was a barrier not to be broken down.

After a few remarks, he asked her about the old nurse, Kezia Davies. He would like to see her. Was she able to receive a visitor ? Mrs. Brock was of opinion that Kezia's condi-

THE POINTING FINGER

tion made the intrusion of visitors an affair of complete indifference. Mostly she was asleep. Her lucid moments were brief and unreliable. Still, if Captain Mallory wished——

Captain Mallory did wish, and Captain Mallory betook himself to that portion of the Abbey given up to the aged creature and her attendant.

The neat maid admitted him and received his message. She was a new-comer since his last visit, and had first announced that her charge was too weak and "dazed" that morning to see any stranger.

"But I'm not a stranger," exclaimed Mallory. "I'm one of the family—as much as Lady Susan or Lord Edensore."

So the girl blushed, curtsied, and retired to acquaint old Kezia with the fact, if she was capable of comprehending it.

Jasper waited in the neat sitting-room with its texts, and its great Bible on the centre table, and its pictures and photographs of all the members of the family. How familiar they all were! Here he had come as a child, as a boy, as a man on the threshold of life. Now——

THE POINTING FINGER

He looked away and out of the queer lancet windows to the wide stretch of country below and around.

All Ronald's now. And so nearly it might have been his! He bit his lip savagely at the thought.

Why should things happen in this contrary fashion? Why should one member of the family lord it over another? Why should debt and difficulty and hardships be his portion, while his cousin owned all this vast estate?

The frown gathered more blackly on his brow. His bloodshot eyes held a look cruel as hate, more merciless than envy. "If I could find the way!" he muttered. "If I had but one safe tool whom I could trust! That fool O'Shea must have bungled terribly. No wonder he's afraid to write. And yet I'd forgive the bungling if only I had him at hand. Two heads to plan; two pair of hands to execute. Powers above! it would go hard with my insolent cousin then!"

The sound of the opening door made him start.

Mary Anne stood there. "She will see you,

THE POINTING FINGER

sir. She's wide awake and quite sensible. Will you please come this way ? ”

He followed her into the adjoining bedroom. The aged nurse turned her dim eyes to his face as he approached the bedside. He addressed her with affected cheerfulness, but with inward awe. He had always feared Kezia the seeress. He feared even more this old, strange creature who seemed half on the borders of another land, half hesitating on the threshold of departure.

“ Yes, I know you,” she whispered huskily, in answer to his question. “ Bad and black of heart as ever, Jasper. I see your record facing me even as I read your face.”

The young man flushed angrily. He looked round. Mary Anne was at the other end of the room by the window. He hoped she had not heard these undesirable compliments. He could hit upon no efficient rejoinder, so he stood sulkily there with his hands in his pockets.

“ The Lord has revealed it unto me,” went on the strange old creature. “ In the night watches hath a voice spoken. Wait for the appointed end—wait—wait.”

He made an impatient rejoinder. He asked

THE POINTING FINGER

of her health and general welfare, but she moved her hand impatiently.

"Thou hast had a warning," she went on in the same sibilant whisper. "Take thou heed to it, Jasper, and take heed to thy ways. For he whom thy bloodthirsty mind has reckoned dead, yet lives. And he shall arise as if from the dead to confound thee and thy plots. The hand of Fate points to him—the hand of Fate will guide him thither at the appointed time!"

Jasper's ashen face and quivering lips were signs of inward perturbation. But curiosity mastered even the fear that had fallen upon him.

"What is it you mean?" he stammered. "Is this one of your visions? If so——"

"Lie not to me, Jasper!" she said, with sudden sternness. "Where I stand is where no human feet may tread. What I speak is what is given unto me for testimony. Therefore take heed to thy ways."

There was a moment's silence. Her eyes were closed, but her lips moved. Words dropped slowly, significantly; then at greater speed.

Eagerly Jasper Mallory listened. And as he

THE POINTING FINGER

heard a coward's fear gnawed at his heart. But whether the words were vision or prediction he could not say. Only, as he listened in dumb wonder, his bewilderment grew. How could this bedridden centenarian, lying here in solitude, have learnt of such things? How people her scene with word-portraiture that showed him place and person? Dreary regions of swamp and forest; fierce tribes, deserted travellers. How paint treachery and murder; the white man's hatred stretching ever and ever, like a merciless hand, towards one young harmless life?

And the closing triumph of her words. "He is not dead; he hath escaped thee—" brought the blood to his face and fury to his heart. Unable to command himself any longer, he turned abruptly away and left the room.

The girl, Mary Anne, stared after him in surprise. Then she crossed over to the old woman's side.

She was lying back on the pillow, white and still.

The girl touched her hand; spoke her name. No response reached her.

THE POINTING FINGER

The aged seeress had spoken her last word ;
had seen her last vision on this side of
Eternity.

It was dusk before the Earl and his cousin
returned from their ride. Lady Anne told
them the news. They listened sad and silent.

When Lady Sue heard of Jasper's visit she
grew somewhat indignant. "What right had
he to disturb her ? You know, mother, Kezia
disliked him always. He should not have been
permitted to see her ! "

"Who—and what ought not to have been
seen ? " asked Mallory's harsh voice almost
at her elbow.

She started, and turned round on him with
sudden anger. "You there ! How I hate
people who steal upon one in that horrid
silent way ! "

"I conclude it was the proverbial case of
listeners," sneered her cousin. "But you
surely don't blame me for poor old Kezia's
demise ? She's had a good 'whack' out of
life all said and done. Even centenarians
can't go on living for ever ! "

Lady Sue made no reply. She threw down

THE POINTING FINGER

her riding-whip and gloves and removed her hat. Lady Anne handed her some tea. She drank it standing there in gloomy silence. The shadows were falling apace over the old Abbey. Another death, and this ill-fated and detestable presence! She remembered how she had called Jasper Mallory a stormy petrel. Certainly he was exemplifying the title.

Ronald had told her something of the scene of the previous evening. He had been compelled to do so on account of the change of rooms. Jasper's performance was not at all pleasant. Neither did he desire a repetition of what had occurred. Lady Sue had wondered much at the incident of the Pointing Finger.

"You know it portends death, or disaster?" she said to her cousin.

"Perhaps he only fancied it; a drunken dream. He was bordering on delirium tremens."

"Oh! I wish he had never come here!" she cried suddenly.

"Or that he would go," said Ronald. "If his fright of last night were repeated I think he would take himself off."

THE POINTING FINGER

But as they sat round the table Jasper Mallory announced his intention of remaining on. He had asked Mrs. Brock to change his room. She had done so.

He was now in the more modern and habitable part of the building ; a small room but good enough for him. The blue room at the end of the gallery, near Lady Anne's suite of chambers.

Ronald looked seriously annoyed. But it was Lady Sue who dropped a new pebble of disturbance into the troubled waters.

" I am glad you are settled to your satisfaction," she said. " Especially as I am leaving here to-morrow."

" Leaving ! — You ? " — exclaimed Jasper Mallory.

Ronald turned a pale surprised face to hers. He could not speak. It seemed impossible.

" Yes," said Lady Sue. " I'm going to London."

CHAPTER IX

LADY SUE was as good as her word.

She was an illustration of the bad effects of spoiling a child. She had always been wilful, always inclined to have her own way—always ruled her weaker and more placid mother. Society had spoiled her also; rejoicing in her brilliance, her good humour, her apt readiness to join in and accept any whim of the moment.

She took a cometic interest in everything. She was never known to be out of humour, and was always ready to amuse or be amused by the follies of fashion. No one had troubled to look below the surface of such charming adaptability. No one had credited her with any deep feeling. She had never paused to ask herself whether she was capable of anything of the sort. Whether, when life ceased to be a delightful round of pleasure

THE POINTING FINGER

and excitement, there was anything real or serious for her to fall back upon.

It was only when she found herself in London and in the always delightful company of her chosen and most intimate friend that Lady Sue took herself to task for her last freak.

This friend, the pretty and popular Mrs. Oliver Ebury, or as her set called her " Mrs. Norry " Ebury, had married almost on leaving school. She was very rich, very lovely, very much admired, and she and Lady Sue mutually adored each other. Lady Sue's sudden flight from the dreariness of Wales to the cosy and exquisite household of Pont Street had been occasioned by a letter from this same friend. She declared herself on the eve of departure for Cairo, and Lady Sue felt it imperative that a council of war should be held before that departure.

Her recent mourning rendered all gaieties impossible, but a " quiet " restaurant dinner, followed by a boudoir confidence, was a delightful change from the usual dull evenings that of late had been her portion.

Mrs. Ebury had proved the unselfishness of

THE POINTING FINGER

friendship by devoting this whole evening to her old schoolfellow. It was not, however, until tea-gowns and ten o'clock had found them established in the special charming nest sacred to the lovely young mistress, that the real import of both visit and confidence showed itself.

"Now," said Mrs. Ebury, "you may talk as much as you like, and tell me as much as you please. I promise to listen, or advise, or rebuke, or whatever you desire. How I wish you smoked! It's so unsocial doing it alone."

She lit a cigarette, leaned back in her chair, and crossed her pretty slippered feet.

Lady Sue also leant back, pulled up the cushions to support her head, and with her eyes on the fire, commenced a recital of the strange happenings of this past month.

"Now, Editha," she concluded, "I want to tell you something that I haven't dared breathe to a living soul. I've kept it to myself until I feel as if—well, as if I couldn't keep it any longer."

She paused breathlessly, and leant forward, clasping her hands around her knees.

THE POINTING FINGER

"Oh! you needn't tell—I can guess," said her friend. "You're in love with Ronnie."

Lady Sue started slightly, and then turned indignant eyes upon the pretty speaker.

"You're entirely wrong," she said indignantly. "I'm not in love—not the least bit in the world."

"All the same, the idea of becoming Countess of Edensore is less unpleasant, shall we say, than it was a year ago."

"He is so—different," murmured Lady Sue thoughtfully. "Editha, tell me, do you think it's possible for a man to change so much that in two years he should speak, act, and think as if he were another man? I don't express it very well, perhaps; but it's like this. Say you have a frame and it holds a photograph, a special photograph, always associated with that frame. Suddenly you find a new photograph in it. The frame is there, the associations are there, but the old photograph is—not."

Mrs. Ebury stared at her. Then she took the cigarette from between her lips, blew a cloud of smoke ceilingwards, and holding

THE POINTING FINGER

the cigarette poised in one upraised hand, said—

“ Please say that again ! I never guessed a conundrum in my life.”

Lady Sue drew her delicate brows together in a sharp sudden frown. “ I’m perfectly serious. Can a man have the face, form, looks, ways of another man, and yet in some essential indescribable way miss something that made the other man—objectionable ? ”

“ It sounds rather worse that way,” said Editha Ebury, replacing the cigarette. “ Do you want to convey that two men are alike, yet not the same ; or are the same, yet not alike ? ”

“ That’s just it ! ” exclaimed Lady Sue eagerly. “ So alike and yet so different that but for something——”

She broke off abruptly. “ The personality colours everything of importance but differs in some way. I can’t say how. I only feel it.”

“ You are speaking of your cousin, of course ? ”

“ I am speaking of the present Earl of Edensore.”

THE POINTING FINGER

"Well, they're the same. He is your cousin, isn't he?"

"That's just what I can't determine," said Lady Sue.

"But, my dear child, you are speaking in paradoxes. Ronald, Viscount Rolleston, who went out to Africa two years ago, is surely recognisable as Ronald, Earl of Edensore, your next and nearest of kin?"

"One would think so," said Lady Sue. "I did think so at first. Then something puzzled me. I have told you of the strange old woman half seeress, half visionary, who has been nurse at the Abbey for two generations."

"Old Kezia—yes?"

"Well, the first time Ronnie went to see her after his return she did not recognise him."

"Nothing so wonderful in that, surely? She's a hundred years old. Deaf, blind, paralysed."

"I know. But her other faculties were keen and clear. She said the oddest thing that—that day. At first I paid no attention. It was only afterwards——"

THE POINTING FINGER

"After—any special occurrence?" asked Mrs. Ebury.

"Yes. Then I wondered if it could be possible that——" Again she broke off. "Oh! it sounds madder than any Rider Haggard romance! You'll think I'm going out of my senses if I tell you."

"Never mind what I think," said her friend. "Tell me."

"It has to do with a past history of the family. One not too creditable."

"My dear, all old families have histories and most of them hold something discreditable."

"Well, this one is upon the usual lines. My uncle, the late earl, had an—episode—in his life. The—the person suddenly disappeared. She was a foreigner. I never could ascertain her exact name or position. But soon afterwards Uncle Geoffrey married. It was a marriage of arrangement; a family affair. For years they had no children. Then Ronald was born. You know he and I were almost like brother and sister. Uncle Geoffrey and my mother had always been devoted to one another. It was an idea, natural enough, I suppose, that I should—marry Ronald. When

THE POINTING FINGER

he left England on his last expedition, I had made up my mind that nothing would induce me to do so. For two years I never had word or sign from him. For two years I told myself that whatever happened, whatever choice I made——”

“And you had plenty of chances,” murmured her friend.

Lady Sue nodded carelessly. “I think I had. But I don’t ‘cotton’ to matrimony, as the Americans say. But to continue—whatever choice I made, it should not be Ronald. Well, I went down to the old Abbey, as you know, after Uncle Geoffrey’s death. After two years I met Ronnie again. It is that meeting—it is that renewal of the old intimacy which exemplifies my theory of the old frame and the new photograph! There stands the frame. Colour, height, feature, voice, I see Ronald of two years ago. Below and beneath the surface I do *not* see him. He looks at me as Ronald never looked; he speaks to me as Ronald never spoke. He—he loves me, Editha, as Ronald never loved, and he is afraid to tell me so!”

Mrs. Ebury threw away her cigarette, half

THE POINTING FINGER

smoked. It was her turn now to stare and to wonder.

"Perhaps it is the change from youth to manhood," she said. "The effects of danger and hardships and responsibility. He may have learnt the nature of his feelings in absence. Nothing changes a man so much as a real serious passion. It seems to me as if you want to make a mystery out of ordinary circumstances."

"The circumstances are not—ordinary," said Lady Sue. "Taking into account the change in Ronald, the fact of his looking a great deal older than he ought to look, or did look, the fact of his impressing me as the Ronald I knew before never could and never would have impressed me—taking all this and seeing too the restraint he puts upon himself, the effort not to betray his feelings when I can see that his feelings are betraying him, what can I make of it but mystery?"

"Doubles are fashionable nowadays," observed Mrs. Ebury. "Perhaps——"

"Don't be ridiculous," said Lady Sue. "I'm in deadly serious earnest. I did not breathe a word of suspicion to mother. I

THE POINTING FINGER

knew it would be hopeless. But I felt I must speak to someone. I should go out of my mind if I didn't ! ”

Mrs. Ebury suddenly sat up in her chair and looked searchingly at the beautiful agitated face.

“ My dear—— ” she said, and then softly under her breath, “ Oh, Sue ! ”

“ Yes, it is, ‘ Oh, Sue,’ with a vengeance ! ” exclaimed the girl savagely. “ After all these years ! After scoffing at the very idea of caring for a man—caring in *that* way ! ”

“ You do care ? ”

“ I don't care who he is, he is a man. To me the only man the world holds. And yet, and yet—— Oh, Editha, I'm so wretched ! ”

She burst into sudden passionate tears. Tears so bitter, so unusual, that she hardly recognised herself as shedding them. She, the laughing, careless, popular society girl, to be weeping like a mere commonplace kitchenmaid over a faithless sweetheart. Not that Lady Sue's sweetheart was faithless, or even acknowledged. But all the same her spoilt petted life had turned to dust and ashes. She faced a stern reality. She recognised

THE POINTING FINGER

life's deeper, wider meaning. She loved and she desired love, and all she saw was chaos and confusion.

Mrs. Ebury soothed and consoled, and tried to persuade her that after all there could not possibly be two Ronalds, two Lords of Edensore. If so, where was the real one? "Besides," she went on eagerly, "there must be ways of proving identity. Did this present Ronald, as we'll call him, recognise places and people? Did he know names? Is his handwriting the same? Surely the lawyers would have known if the signature was different. Two men may resemble each other very closely, but two men would never write exactly alike."

"They don't," said Lady Sue. "But that was explained at once. Ronald had received a wound in his right hand during a brush with some savage tribe. That wound has contracted the muscles, and he holds his pen differently. The lawyers had accepted that explanation before I came on the scene!"

Mrs. Ebury's pretty face became thoughtful and perplexed. "It is really very puzzling," she said. "Have you any explanation to

THE POINTING FINGER

offer? Who went out with your cousin? Surely he had guides, or companions, or something?"

"If so, I know nothing of them," said Lady Sue. "Nor does mother. His father of course knew, and his father had letters from him, but those letters are not procurable by us. Not without some efficient reason."

"And you feel satisfied in your own mind that this man——"

Lady Sue rose and stood leaning against the mantelpiece.

"Editha," she said, "it seems a dreadful thing; a terrible thing to say, but I am as sure as that I live, that the real Ronald is dead, and that this Ronald, whoever he is, has no right to call himself the Earl of Edensore!"

CHAPTER X

AFTER that emphatic declaration there was a momentary silence. Both women were interested beyond all mere conventionality in the subject under discussion, and to one of them it appealed as nothing in her previous experience had appealed.

Mrs. Ebury broke the silence at last.

"Sue," she said, "this is rather tragic. The—let us call him the Pretender—has won from you what no man, however devoted, or rich, or gifted, or honourable, has been able to win. Not only your interest, but your heart. Now, my dear, it goes without saying that to please one so fastidious and so *difficile* as yourself, implies a certain amount of worth or attraction in that fortunate person. First, then, the Pretender is a gentleman?"

"Editha!" exclaimed her friend, flashing

THE POINTING FINGER

round, a red spot of anger burning on her cheek.

"That indignation is answer enough," said Mrs. Ebury. "We grant him the education and the instincts that go to refine the natural man. With such hereditary virtues and instincts how do you reconcile his present position to his claims on honour?"

"I don't reconcile them. I can't. It's that which troubles me. It doubles the mystery and incredibility of the situation."

"He himself has, of course, never given a hint as to what filled up those two years of absence?"

Lady Sue seated herself again.

"No," she said. "Except, of course, sporting records and travel."

"Is it possible, do you think, that in the course of those travels he could have come across your cousin? Learnt his history; agreed to change places?"

Lady Sue started. "What an idea! Why should Ronnie consent to such a thing?"

"Because Ronnie—that particular Ronnie—always hated the prerogatives of civilisation. Because he was a rover by nature and disposi-

THE POINTING FINGER

tion. Having once tasted the delights of freedom, it might have occurred to him that those delights would never pall. I have heard of such things."

"Such a case as that would involve Ronnie in endless complications, leaving alone its falsehood and dishonour."

"True. But he was young and hot-headed, and impressionable. For aught you know, it might be a case of 'a dusky bride' as says the maudlin hero of Locksley Hall. Then the chance came to slip someone else into his shoes, while the vagary lasted."

Lady Sue shook her head. "No. That's too wild an idea. My theory is that something happened to Ronnie. That—that the other saw an opportunity, a temptation, and took it because—because——"

"I wouldn't go into the question of reasons," said Mrs. Ebury dryly. "We'll leave the Pretender a shred of decency while we can. In any case, the important issue is not yet arrived at. What do you intend to do?"

Lady Sue let her delicate ringed hands fall helplessly on her lap. "I—don't—know," she faltered.

THE POINTING FINGER

"How long did you wait on events after you had made the discovery?"

"I left the next day. It was while we were riding to Carn Brae that the idea took hold of me. I had been uncertain, doubtful, before. Then suddenly I felt sure."

"Because he made love to you?"

"No," she said, flushing hotly. "Because he did *not* make love to me, as you call it. It was the strangest thing. I told him he had changed very much. 'For the worse?' he asked. 'Oh, no!' I said—'for the better.' He looked embarrassed. He asked in what way? I tried to think of the many ways. He was so thoughtful, so considerate, so gentle, and yet so masterful. The more I said the stranger he became. It was as if he had resolutely withdrawn into himself, and nothing I could say would induce him to come out of that shell. When he did speak again it was to paint himself in lurid colours. To try and persuade me I was mistaken. That again the old Ronnie would never have done. He was too self-opinionated. Then he resolutely turned the subject away from ourselves—from himself. He became not

THE POINTING FINGER

indifferent, but — disappointing. The ride home was miserably depressing. It was then I made up my mind to come to you."

"What did he say when he heard of that intention?"

"Nothing. Only his face grew very white. He came to the station with me, but Jasper Mallory came also. We had no opportunity for a word together. He asked me how long I should be away, but his tone was so ordinary and conventional that I felt annoyed. I said I should probably go to Cairo with you."

Mrs. Ebury laughed softly. "I can picture the scene. And then?"

"That was all. I got into the train and came off. Mother had insisted on Taylor accompanying me, as it was such a long journey. We had the carriage to ourselves. We arrived safe and sound, and I have told you—everything."

"It is a very queer story," said Mrs. Ebury.

"I agree with you. It is. The question remains—what ought I to do? What do you advise me to do? Is it possible for woman's wit to find a way out of the tangle?"

THE POINTING FINGER

"There is another question, my dear. Does the woman want to unravel the tangle, or only knot it together in her own fashion?"

"She wants both, I'm afraid," said Lady Sue in a sudden, hopeless way.

"Both—are impossible. You know that. If the man has any worth in him he must be ashamed of a false position. He must be ready to explain it. Cut the knot if you are impatient. Tell him your suspicions. Ask him to explain it."

"That sounds very easy," said Lady Sue. "But you see you don't know him. If you did, if you recognised how completely he fits the situation, what a common cur Mallory looks beside him, what a simple fool the—the other Ronnie—you would agree with me that the circumstances are too delicate and bewildering for interference without proof."

"But is there no way of getting proof?"

Lady Sue shook her lovely head. "None—that I know of. I dare not hint my suspicions to mother. Still less to Jasper. And if—if it came to a decision between Jasper and——"

"And the Pretender?"

"Oh, don't, Editha! I mean between

THE POINTING FINGER

the two, I could not decide in favour of Jasper. He is odious and insufferable. A drunkard and a coward. Fancy, he talks of resigning his commission because of the war ! ”

“ No ! ”

“ It’s perfectly true. I felt I could have—but no matter. It’s only in keeping with his other hatefulness ! ”

“ You have left the two men together at the Abbey ? ”

“ Yes. I don’t know how long Jasper intends to remain. He must see he is unwelcome.”

“ Do you think he has any suspicion as to the Earl ? ”

“ I’m sure he hasn’t ! He only said he looked older and thinner and that it must have been the rough, terrible life. But as for his not being the real Ronnie that I am sure he has never suspected.”

“ Well, as I said before, it is the queerest tangle ! I suppose you wouldn’t go to the lawyers ? They might suggest——”

“ They would think I was mad. He has everything exact. Why, Mr. Bryantson, the head of the firm, was with him for a whole

THE POINTING FINGER

week. If he was deceived then, what chance of enlightening him now ? ”

She rose again and began moving restlessly to and fro in the charming room. Her friend remained seated ; staring thoughtfully into the fire.

“ I wish I wasn’t going to Cairo,” she said suddenly. “ I’d love to have seen this thing through. Do you know, Sue, there’s just one solution of the puzzle that doesn’t seem to have occurred to you ? ”

Lady Sue’s face was eager. She came back to her place again and drew up her chair.

“ You remember the story of the episode ? ” said Mrs. Ebury. “ Supposing it had had a sequel ? Supposing there were two sons of the House of Edensore ? Supposing that Fate had chosen they should meet, that the likeness of descent spoke out in that strange way by which Nature brands our sins upon their innocent victims ? Supposing the two had claimed acquaintance and that death or accident had removed one, leaving not only temptation but possibility in the hands of the other—what then ? ”

Lady Sue turned a white face and excited

THE POINTING FINGER

eyes to the questioner. "What then?" she whispered breathlessly. "Why—what could there be but just what has happened? Oh! Editha, if you are right, if you have hit upon the solution——"

"I have given it probability at all events."

"You have. And supposing you are right, it makes things seem not——"

"Not quite so bad? Sue, Sue, you are a Jesuit at pleading! You know in your heart that a sin is a sin, a crime is a crime. No earthly judge ever excused the one or other on account of the reasons for their committal!"

"I know. I know. But this sinner has some excuse. He was sinned against in the first instance. He, in all but a legal formality, was the heir. How do we know but that Ronnie suggested the scheme? How do we know that if unable to come home himself, he—he——"

"You are getting into difficulties," said Mrs. Ebury. "And you are certainly not holding a brief for honour. If it is a case of substitution, that does not do away with right and justice and legality. If one man is taking the place of the other for some good

THE POINTING FINGER

and sufficient reason, why has he made a mystery of it? On the other hand, even if the real heir of Edensore has met with his death, and dying gave his rights up to this acknowledged brother, how does that authorise his claim? I grant you Jasper Mallory is detestable, but even detestable heirs have rights."

"It is all horrible, incomprehensible!" exclaimed Lady Sue vehemently. "Oh! what will be the end? What ought I to do? What can I do?"

CHAPTER XI

THE feminine conclave broke up with that question unanswered ; that problem unsolved.

It has been said that women lack the keen sense of honour with which men are credited. They are inclined to palter with temptations, and excuse stray excursions from the straight, hard road of duty and obligation. Certainly Lady Sue was blaming the sin and excusing the sinner in approved feminine fashion. But then this special sinner happened to be a man who had appealed to her more directly than any man she had yet known. For the first time in her life, interest was not only aroused, but beset by difficulties. Difficulties to a girl of Lady Sue's temperament meant only a delightful change from the dead level of commonplace. She looked at them from a standpoint of "What woman wills, the world wills." Never having been denied

THE POINTING FINGER

anything she desired, she looked upon denial as a wrong to her personal prerogatives. Obstacles were for her to surmount, not to yield to.

But the next morning was destined to add yet another link to the chain of confusion which for once fettered both will and desire. The link took the form of a letter. It was enclosed in one from Lady Anne, who said that it had arrived after her daughter's departure, and been forwarded at once. Lady Sue looked at the letter with some wonder. It bore a significance of its own, as some letters do. The envelope was common, the writing apparently disguised and totally unfamiliar. The letter was sealed, also, with a common splash of sealing-wax pressed down apparently by a coin. A foreign coin. The impression on the wax interested her. She took a small magnifying glass, and by its aid discovered that the coin bore the head of Krüger, the defender and lawgiver of the Transvaal. The stamp on the letter was, however, an ordinary penny stamp. The postmark—London.

She opened the envelope by slipping a sharp penknife along the upper fold, thus keeping the

THE POINTING FINGER

seal intact. The notepaper she drew out was as common as the envelope. The writing again looked as if disguised.

She glanced over the first page. Her face grew very pale. Her eyes dilated with astonishment. She read :—

“DEAR MADAM,—I take the liberty of addressing you instead of any other member of your family, to say that the writer of this letter is possessed of certain information concerning your cousin, the young Lord Rolleston, important to yourself. The said writer has only just arrived from South Africa. What he has to tell is of great importance. He can only treat with you *personally* and by appointment.

“If you do not agree to see him, it will mean a great danger to your family. Please reply to address given.—Yours obediently,

“DANIEL O’SHEA.

“P.S.—Beware of wolves in sheep’s clothing !
D. O’S.”

Lady Sue read this strange missive twice. It puzzled her. The name of the writer was unknown. The address he gave was certainly not one in any aristocratic quarter. An hotel in

THE POINTING FINGER

Buckingham Street, Strand. The hints and mystery of the communication alarmed her. Was she to hear news of Ronnie—the true Ronnie—or be assured of treachery in another quarter?

She was standing staring thoughtfully at the communication when there came a light tap at the door. Her friend's voice asked if she might come in. Receiving permission, she entered in a delightful morning wrap of wadded satin. She too had a letter in her hand.

"We're not going to Cairo, Sue," she exclaimed. "Fancy—— But what's the matter? You look queer!"

"Queer?" laughed Lady Sue. "I feel it. I've just had an extraordinary letter. I wish you'd read it, Editha. Following on the heels of our talk last night it seems something more than coincidence."

Mrs. Ebury took the letter and read it.

"I wonder if it's a 'do'?" she said. "A try on, to extort money; frighten you? You surely won't make the appointment?"

"I want the information," said Lady Sue doggedly. "See how odd it is that this man

THE POINTING FINGER

should know of Ronnie abroad, and apparently be ignorant of the—the succession.”

“ Yes. That certainly is queer. But he says he has only just arrived. And judging by the letter he is not of a class of persons to read society news in society papers. He may not know.”

“ He does not know. That is evident. The mystery deepens, Editha.”

“ It does. Come and breakfast in my room and talk it over. Oh ! never mind your hair. Oliver won't be there. He's gone off to the agents about exchanging our tickets or something.”

“ Why are you not going to Cairo ? ”

“ Well, we ought to have gone in January. Now Oliver has heard that there's been an outbreak of plague. He never did want to go. It's so far from his beloved city ! My dear, never marry a business man. His whole heart is bound up in stocks and shares, and queer things that go up, or fall, or become fandangoes—no, cantangoes, that's the word. What it means I haven't the slightest idea, but it enables me to get new gowns, so I don't find fault with it, or with Norry ! ”

THE POINTING FINGER

She was leading the way to her own boudoir, where breakfast was laid for two. They drank their coffee and trifled with various delicacies while still keeping thought and mind on the subject of the mysterious letter.

"What puzzles me," said Editha Ebury, "is why this man should write to you. How could he have learnt your name and address?"

"From—Ronnie, of course. He says so."

She read out the passage in question.

"I don't see that that is any proof," objected Mrs. Ebury.

"Proof enough for me. And the post-script? Have you remembered that?"

"It holds the gist of the whole letter."

"Yes. It points to—to my own suspicions. Editha, I must risk it! I must see this man."

"I don't like the idea. It might be a plan, a trap."

Lady Sue laughed scornfully.

"My dear, we're not living in the Dark Ages. The—the person who wrote this would surely have sense enough to credit me with

THE POINTING FINGER

the ordinary precaution of leaving the address behind me. If I don't return in an hour you can send a—policeman—to fetch me ! ”

“ It's all very well to laugh, but I can't help feeling uncomfortable.”

“ And I only feel desperately curious,” said Lady Sue. “ I shall hear the truth of this ‘ Prisoner of Zenda ’ business. I shall know who is masquerading as Ronald. It's worth some risk to do that. And now, as that decision is off my mind, tell me were you serious about Cairo ? Are you not going—really ? ”

“ No. It's so late now, and Norry says some tiresome business has cropped up. He suggested Algiers, or the Riviera. And that you should come with me.”

“ I'd have loved to go under the circumstances, but I won't leave England until I've solved this mystery.”

“ Well, it's certain I don't want to go alone,” said Mrs. Ebury. “ And equally certain that you can't stay in town by yourself. Of course, if Lady Anne is coming up——”

“ But she's not. She's staying on at the

THE POINTING FINGER

Abbey to keep house for Ron—for—well, the other man."

"It would be funny," said Mrs. Ebury, "if you had made a mistake? If, after all, the real Ronald was in his right place?"

Lady Sue started.

"Why did you say that? And after my story, too!"

"Men change unaccountably," said her friend. "And in cold blood and looking at the matter in cold daylight I cannot for the life of me see why any man should run such a risk as the 'Pretender' is running; if he is the—Pretender?"

"I gave you the only possible explanation last night. You know we arrived at the same conclusion."

"Will you let me tell Oliver about the affair?" asked Mrs. Ebury suddenly.

"Certainly not," said Lady Sue. "No one is to hear a word of it except yourself. I expect you to respect my confidence as sacred."

"Of course I will, if you say so. Only I do hope nothing dreadful will happen and then I shall get blamed."

THE POINTING FINGER

"Why should anything dreadful happen?" asked Lady Sue, rising from the table.

Mrs. Ebury shrugged her graceful shoulders. "I don't know. One has misgivings. This affair looks different this morning."

"It looks more solid. It looks as if the clue to my own misgivings were suddenly put into my hand. Of course, the man who wrote that letter may be an impostor. In that case affairs are in the same position. On the other hand, there may be a reason for his addressing me. The sooner we are out of suspense the better."

"We?" smiled her friend.

"I credit you with a little natural curiosity."

"My dearest Sue, credit me with a great deal; with a consuming desire to know what it all means—how it will all end. I am as much interested as yourself."

Lady Sue crossed over to the writing-table in the window. "I will answer this at once," she said. "I will make the appointment for to-morrow."

"Do you think it wise to give this address?" asked Mrs. Ebury.

THE POINTING FINGER

"My dear Editha, you have a husband. You need not fear objectionable callers."

"I am not afraid of myself, Sue. I was only thinking of you."

Lady Sue handed her the few brief lines she had written. She hastily ran her eye over them. "Yes, that's very good. Straight to the point. Shall I have it sent to the post?"

"No," said Lady Sue. "I have an odd fancy about this letter. I don't wish your servants to see the name or the address. I will post it myself when we go out."

"O'Shea," murmured Mrs. Ebury thoughtfully. "It has an Irish flavour about it."

Lady Sue laughed. "Well, I've never met an Irishman yet. It will be a new experience."

"They're either the truest gentlemen or the greatest blackguards on the face of the earth," said Mrs. Ebury.

"How interesting!" said Lady Sue. "I wonder under which heading my correspondent will come!"

CHAPTER XII

LADY SUE's correspondent took an unexpected method of replying to her brief and guarded communication. He wired back—"All right, ten-thirty, to-morrow."

"He means business, you see," was her remark to Mrs. Ebury.

Mrs. Ebury nodded thoughtfully. "You must take Taylor with you," she said. "She can wait in the coffee-room, or whatever it is, until your interview is over."

"Poor staid, respectable Taylor!" laughed Lady Sue. "What a shock to her sensibilities!"

"I suppose if we knew what our servants really thought of us, it would be a shock to our sensibilities," remarked Mrs. Ebury. "All said and done, my dear Sue, it's a very good thing that we go through life with a veil between our outer and inner selves."

THE POINTING FINGER

"I suppose it is. Editha, what am I to do to kill the time? I wish I had said to-day; to-night even. It seems an eternity till to-morrow."

"I hope it mayn't be worse for you after to-morrow," said her friend. "You may hear something that will make you wish to put the clock back—not forward."

Lady Sue's lovely face turned a shade paler. She made no reply.

"Suppose we have a hansom and go to Bond Street. I want some new blouses."

Her hand was on the bell when the door opened, and a footman entered. He carried another telegram on the silver salver in his hand. He handed it to his mistress. She read it quickly. Lady Sue watching her, noted that she looked disturbed.

"Any reply, madam?" inquired the man.

"No. Yes. Wait a moment. Go into the hall."

The man obeyed the contradictory orders by leaving the room.

Mrs. Ebury turned to her friend. "This concerns you, Sue," she said gravely. "Read it for yourself."

THE POINTING FINGER

She handed the telegram, and Lady Sue glanced rapidly over its contents.

"Accident has happened to Edensore. Break news to Sue. No alarm. Am writing particulars."

It was from Lady Anne. As her daughter took in the significance of the information she realised for the first time the real meaning of fear. Her lips blanched and quivered. The hand that held the slip of paper shook like a leaf.

"An accident—what does it mean? What can have happened?" she faltered.

"It can't be very serious," said her friend soothingly. "You see the message says 'no alarm.' He may have sprained his ankle, or injured his arm, or had a fall from his horse, or—does he motor?"

"No. And the horse doesn't live that could throw him! He is a perfect horseman. Editha, I have a presentiment. Jasper Mallory has something to do with this!"

"Presentiments never serve any wise purpose," answered Mrs. Ebury. "You must wait for your mother's letter. Do you wish to send back a message? There are forms

THE POINTING FINGER

on the writing-table, and the boy is waiting."

Lady Sue turned hastily to the table. Then she paused and faced her friend again.

"What's the use?" she said. "What can I say that doesn't sound—inadequate?"

She sank into a chair and looked helplessly from the telegram to the face of Mrs. Ebury.

"I agree with you. A telegram is bald and poverty-stricken. You had best wait for the particulars."

"I—I ought to go to them," said Lady Sue. "Mother is so helpless in any emergency. If I left by the night mail——"

"What about the interview to-morrow morning?"

"Oh!" groaned Lady Sue. "Was there ever such a hailstorm of disasters! Editha, advise me, for God's sake!"

"My advice is to wait for the letter. You can do no possible good by rushing back to Wales."

"I know that, but——"

"You asked me to advise you. Well, I think it wiser to wait on events than to worry

THE POINTING FINGER

about them. If this individual's information is worth anything it is worth waiting for. At least, you may have arrived at some definite conclusion after the interview to-morrow as to the two Dromios, or whatever they are. If the man who has met with the accident is *not* the earl, why should you rush off to his bedside under the presumed privileges of relationship? If he is—well, the matter of to-morrow becomes none the less important."

"Then you think I ought to remain until I've seen this O'Shea?"

"Most decidedly. If you like, I will take the responsibility of replying to the message. Wait a moment."

She took a form and wrote a few words, then handed it to Lady Sue.

"Message received. Much grieved. Do you wish Sue to return? If so, wire."

"There!" exclaimed Mrs. Ebury. "That harms no one; and a return message will assist or prevent a decision."

Lady Sue sighed heavily.

"Yes; I don't see what else is to be done. If I only knew what sort of accident——"

"My dear girl, what difference would that

THE POINTING FINGER

make? Perhaps only add to your worry. Here, give me the message, and I'll send it off."

When she came back, Lady Sue was pacing to and fro the room in a restless perturbed fashion.

"There's one thing I might do," she said. "Wire to this O'Shea and ask him to appoint to-night instead of to-morrow. Then I should be free to catch the first train in the morning. I'd be at the Abbey to-morrow night."

Mrs. Ebury considered the matter a moment. "I suppose it would do no harm," she said. "And if you go on like this you'll work yourself into a fever. It's plain to me, Susan, that you've never had to encounter difficulties or face troubles. Otherwise you'd have learnt the meaning of patience."

Lady Sue's answer to that remark was to write the self-suggested message. It was to this effect:—"Am called away on important business to-morrow. Can you alter appointment to this evening?"

"Yes—that's all right," said Mrs. Ebury. "But we mustn't send it by a servant."

"No, of course not. Let's go ourselves."

THE POINTING FINGER

" And add 'Reply to Post Office, Vere Street,'" said Mrs. Ebury.

" Why ? "

" For two good and sufficient reasons. We can have lunch at Prince's to while away the time, and call for the answer afterwards. You will get it sooner, and you won't have to hurry back here. A little shopping will distract you. The wind is tempered to the shorn lamb on occasions. Bond Street is in a particularly sheltered position, and Valérie's blouses would console a lamb in sight of her shearers ! "

But Lady Sue was in no mood for raillery. She felt seriously disturbed and distressed. Suspense was new to her, and she bore it badly. Even the attractive programme planned by Editha Ebury proved inefficient as a real distraction. The hours dragged. Luncheon was but a new form of boredom. She met several fashionable acquaintances, but one and all found her strangely quiet and subdued.

" She has grown quite serious," murmured one Society doll to another. And the other merely said how very unbecoming black

THE POINTING FINGER

was—in winter-time—even if one had Titianesque hair to carry it off.

With her eyes on the clock Lady Sue sat through the *table d'hôte* luncheon, marvelling that Editha could eat so much and chat such brilliant nonsense and appear so horribly unsympathetic.

As the moments passed on she grew more and more restless. The noise of the crowded room made her head ache. Before her eyes was one face—always the same one. She saw it pale, haggard, suffering. All sorts of impulses swept through her mind; the strongest and most overpowering was that impulse to go to him. But she knew she must not; she ought not. Oh! if only the hours would not lag so wearily! If only that interview was over and her mind at rest! But would it be at rest?

Her pride rose in frantic rebellion at the probability of any other issue than the one she desired. She was ashamed of her weakness and yet it conquered her. She was honest enough to admit that whichever way the affair terminated she could not shake off that weakness. And the reason? From that she

THE POINTING FINGER

resolutely turned aside. No need to draw it forth into cold daylight and common sense.

At last Mrs. Ebury professed herself satisfied. They left the table and the restaurant. They took another hansom to Vere Street. Mrs. Ebury went into the post office to make the necessary inquiry. She came out with a blank face. Lady Sue's lips framed a voiceless and unnecessary query.

"Nothing—yet," said her friend. "You must remember he might have been out when your wire was delivered. Or perhaps——"

But Lady Sue was staring over her head. Staring at a face: the face of a man who had suddenly paused just behind Mrs. Ebury. She had noticed him loitering in front of the post office; noticed that he had followed her friend inside. Now he came forward.

He lifted his hat. It was a shabby hat. He was dressed in shabby clothes. Yet there was something in his look and manner that spoke of better breeding than his appearance warranted.

"Excuse me, madam"—it was to Mrs. Ebury he spoke. "Am I wrong in surmising

THE POINTING FINGER

that you expected a telegram in the office just now ? ”

She turned abruptly, coloured, and drew herself up. “ What business is that of yours ? ” she said frigidly.

He smiled. His smile was persuasive. His eyes had a twinkle of humour.

“ If you should happen to be Lady Susan Silchester it is very much my business,” he said. “ For I am here to answer your message in person. I only received it a quarter of an hour ago, and for fear your ladyship would have the unnecessary trouble of repeating your call I hurried round myself with the answer.”

He spoke with a strong Irish accent. He looked at the pretty perplexed woman with bold admiring eyes. He was not prepared for the sudden startled exclamation of the other lady in the cab.

She leant forward. Her face flushing, her eyes aflame. “ Do you mean to say,” she exclaimed, “ that you are Mr. O’Shea, to whom I telegraphed this morning ? ”

“ I beg your ladyship’s pardon. Is it you who are the Lady Susan Silchester, my honoured correspondent ? ”

THE POINTING FINGER

"Yes," said Lady Sue quickly. "I heard what you said just now. I called for your reply wire."

"Which same reply I present personally to your ladyship."

She looked at the man and then at Mrs. Ebury and then again at the man. "What—what is the reply?" she asked faintly.

"Faith, madam," he said bluntly, "seein' there's no time like the present and that yourself and the message and the messenger are all handy on the spot, I'm of a mind to suggest the immediate moment."

Lady Sue looked more perplexed. "Now? You mean now? But where?"

"Is the Regent's Park adjacent enough for the purpose?" asked Mr. O'Shea. "If so, your ladyship might just be takin' your cab on to the York Gate. And I'll be waitin' on your pleasure in as few moments as another conveyance will be takin' me there. There's not many people about at this time, and your ladyship and your ladyship's friend may rest assured that the honour of an Irishman, even a poor and distressed one, is pledged for respectful treatment and protection. Daniel O'Shea

THE POINTING FINGER

feels himself privileged by your confidence, and Daniel O'Shea was never the man to break his wurrd to a lady."

Mrs. Ebury looked at Lady Sue, and Lady Sue looked back at Mrs. Ebury. Mr. O'Shea waited patiently on their decision.

Mrs. Ebury suddenly put one foot on the step and one hand on the door. She looked at the waiting figure and then at the cabman.

"Regent's Park, York Gate," she said, and seated herself beside Lady Sue.

CHAPTER XIII

"I SHALL wait for you, out of hearing, of course," said Editha Ebury, as the cab dashed off. "This affair is on the knees of the gods with a vengeance. But you're under my protection, and I must look after you. If we should be seen entering the Park together no one would think anything of it, but if you were there alone it would be a totally different matter."

"What an odd man he is!" said Lady Sue. "Do you think he's a—a gentleman, Editha?"

"Difficult to say. He's certainly not in affluent circumstances. But he was very polite."

"And, thank Heaven, the suspense will be over to-day!"

"Have you any money about you?" asked Mrs. Ebury abruptly.

THE POINTING FINGER

"Money—yes. A few sovereigns. Why do you ask?"

"Because I have an idea that your Irish friend will institute a loan before you have done with him."

Lady Sue crimsoned. "Oh, Editha! What an idea! Why should you think so?"

"Oh! I have presentiments sometimes," answered Mrs. Ebury. "And I'm as certain our out-at-elbows friend wants money, as I am certain that you will have to buy his information from him."

"I don't care," said Lady Sue impatiently. "If what he has to tell me is of value I shall be quite ready to pay for it."

"He may insist on the payment in advance. That is why I asked you how much you had. I could lend you twenty pounds if you wish. I put two ten-pound notes into my purse before I came out. I'll make them over to you. Then you can face any emergency."

She opened her purse and took out the notes. Lady Sue put them into her chatelaine bag.

"I hope they won't be needed," she said. "It's awfully good of you, Editha, to see this thing through."

THE POINTING FINGER

"I'm glad you hadn't to go to that hotel," answered Mrs. Ebury. "I can't tell you how I disliked the idea. As for what Taylor would have imagined—well, words fail me. Remember now that I shall keep you in view all the time. If—if you are alarmed or annoyed, just wave your handkerchief. I shall see the signal, and come to your assistance. I can't help thinking the man's appearance spells adventurer. Still, you have always had your way, and I suppose you always intend to have it!"

"I believe you are every bit as curious as I am myself," said Lady Sue.

"No. I'm only interested—at present."

"The effect is the same. Oh, here we are, thank goodness! Stop the man at the entrance. I won't drive in."

They both got out, paid the cabman, and turned into the broad roadway that led to the Park. Another hansom followed close on their own and also discharged a fare, who handed up his shilling and sauntered in, keeping a respectful distance behind the two graceful figures.

"They're fine women, the both of them," he

THE POINTING FINGER

said. "Somehow I'm glad it's the other one who is Lady Susan. I suppose I must follow their lead?"

At one of the quiet unfrequented roads the two women stopped, turned, and seeing the advancing figure stood still, awaiting him.

Mrs. Ebury was spokeswoman. "Please understand, Mr. O'Shea," she said, "that I have no intention of intruding on your confidence. I shall simply await my friend here."

He bowed politely. "What I have to communicate to Lady Susan is very serious. It may occupy a—considerable time."

"Make it as short as you can. You understand, I suppose, that the circumstances of this meeting are a little—unconventional?"

"The circumstances," said O'Shea gallantly, "are not of the sort that an Irishman would quarrel with, madam."

She smiled despite herself, and turned to Lady Sue. "Remember!" she whispered, and with a slight bow to the pertinacious Hibernian, turned aside into one of the narrow side paths.

Lady Sue's heart beat quickly. "Please

THE POINTING FINGER

don't keep me in suspense," she said. "What did your letter mean?"

"If I answer your ladyship's question directly and at once, confusion would be worse confounded. There is a long story to tell first. It concerns the honour of your family."

"I will listen as patiently as I can," said Lady Sue.

"Then may I suggest to your ladyship that we should walk on? It is cold standing still, and a lengthened conversation would attract attention."

She turned, and they walked slowly down the path.

"To begin with," said the Irishman, "it seems I should apologise to your ladyship for that letter. But seein' that I'm myself the victim of a scoundrelly trick and left, so to say, in the lurch after putting my life in jeopardy, I'm sure your ladyship will excuse my intrusion."

"Yes, yes," said Lady Sue impatiently, "but do please come to the point. What member of my family has wronged you, and how did you find me out?"

THE POINTING FINGER

"Your ladyship has a cousin—Captain Jasper Mallory by name?"

She started. "Yes."

"This same Captain Mallory was stationed at Ballymena, County Cork, a matter of two years or so back."

"Well?" she said impatiently.

"I see I'm right. To continue, then, I made his acquaintance at a time when I was very down on my luck and particularly anxious to get out of Ireland, which same country is in a bad way, and offers no chance for a needy man to better himself. How I came to know Captain Mallory was through a trifling matter of horse-racing, and that led to our better acquaintance. There was talk then of troubles to come in South Africa, and I was thinking of volunteering for the scrimmage when one day Captain Mallory sends for me with a—a sort of proposal."

He paused again. He looked at Lady Sue's lovely intent face, and then away over to the leafless trees and gleaming water in the distance.

"It was a queer sort of suggestion. I didn't like it. But he made out the man was a

THE POINTING FINGER

blackguard and disgrace to the family and that if I kept my eye on him——”

“ But who was it ? I really can't follow you ! ” exclaimed Lady Sue desperately.

“ Who ? Well, best not to be mentioning names, my lady. 'Twas an enemy of the captain's, and a sort of distant connection at the same time.”

“ Not—not Lord Edensore ? ” gasped Lady Sue.

“ No, your ladyship, that wasn't the name at all. A young fellow ; careless, sport-loving, bold as a lion. Sure, when I got to know him and we had camped together and shared adventures by the score, it wasn't in my heart to harm a hair of his head for twice the sum of money I'd been offered. Ronalds was the name he went by, my lady. Just plain Ronalds, with a ' Mister ' to back it. We don't trouble much about superfluous titles out in that land. He was all for adventuring into the wildest part o' the country, where the big game is. He could speak one or two native dialects, and as for me I'd been many times to Africa and was always craving for the life which leaves a taste behind it, my lady, that

THE POINTING FINGER

nothin' quite satisfies ever again. Well, there came a time when the thing I had undertaken to do, looked the bad and blackguard trick it was, and for the soul of me I could not do it. The boy was so trustful, and so frank. Many and many a night as we lay by the camp fire smoking our pipes and listening to the howls and strange cries of wild beasts, and looking up at the stars so clear and calm above us, did I feel inclined to tell him of his cousin's hatred, and how he wanted to be in his shoes. But somehow I didn't. He talked of you, my lady, his cousin Lady Sue, and how you'd been as brother and sister together, and in a way I got to hear a lot about the family, and the old Abbey and its queer stories. So time went on, and then suddenly we got separated. We had gone different ways with native guides for a big shoot. But, of course, we'd planned a meeting-place, so as to be together again. But when I arrived there he hadn't come, and though I waited and waited, divil a sight of him again. Still I hadn't fear of harm, for I knew he was clever enough at the hunter's tricks and used to forest and veldt same as myself, and had had trustworthy Zulus with him. All of a sudden

THE POINTING FINGER

we came on him again. 'Twas near one of the big rivers, and he was trying to get some native tribe to get him a *dhow*. That's a native boat, your ladyship. Well, I didn't like the look of the gentry at all, at all. I told him so, but he wouldn't listen. To make my story a bit shorter, my lady, I soon had proof that my suspicions were correct. They wanted to offer him as a sacrifice to their gods on account of his being a white man and a great hunter. As soon as I discovered this, I warned the boy and the guide who was devoted to him. We planned our escape, but the devils were keener than we thought. 'Tis too horrible a business for your ladyship's ears. I'll only say that I did get out of their clutches, but poor Ronalds wasn't so fortunate."

Lady Sue had grown very white. She shuddered. "Oh! how awful! Do you mean to say then that you left him to the mercy of those black fiends?"

"I couldn't help myself. We all had the same chance."

"But mightn't he have escaped? Wasn't it possible?"

"No, my lady. I fear not. You see 'twas

THE POINTING FINGER

him they wanted ; the white hunter, as I told you."

" But even in cases as desperate, men have escaped, when they've been given up for dead."

" That's true, but this poor lad hadn't a ghost of a chance. Still, bad as that business is, it's not altogether the one about which I've troubled your ladyship."

Lady Sue lifted her ashen face ; she felt as if an icy hand was clutching at her heart.

" Not this ? But what could you possibly have worse to tell me ? "

" Well, more a word of warning about the man whose interest it was that your cousin should die—or disappear."

" You mean Captain Mallory ? "

" The same, my lady. A schemin' black-guard if ever there was one. I can't get word or sign of him. Yet 'twas on his errand I went to Africa. The truth is——"

He hesitated. Lady Sue's hand instinctively went to the chatelaine bag at her waist. How wise Editha had been !

" I understand," she said. " Captain

THE POINTING FINGER

Mallory owes you money. And he won't pay it."

"That's true for your ladyship, but it's not all. I want to get at him. I must see him, and divil a bit can I find out where he is at the present moment."

Lady Sue thrust the bag into his hand.

"That will help you," she said. "For the present I can bear no more. But I shall see you again. I—I must see you. And—if you want an interview with Captain Mallory, write to him at Caerwydden Abbey, North Wales."

"Is it there he is?" exclaimed the Irishman.

His hand had closed over the little velvet bag. He was half ashamed to take it, but he was not in a financial condition to refuse.

"I'm not above accepting a loan from your ladyship, under the circumstances," he said, as they paused and faced one another in the gathering dusk. "There's more behind this than your ladyship knows. There's more to come out maybe than either of us guesses at this present moment."

THE POINTING FINGER

A little hysterical sob caught Lady Sue's throat.

More to come ! Did this man guess or imagine how much more might come out before this mystery was solved ?

CHAPTER XIV

FROM the distance Mrs. Ebury had patiently watched them. Once or twice they stopped abruptly and seemed in eager discussion. Then they resumed their walk. To and fro, to and fro under the leafless trees, and to and fro with exemplary patience paced the interested spectator. Half an hour, three-quarters, an hour. And still the interview was not over.

Mrs. Ebury was tired and cold. A chill wind had sprung up. The bare branches of the leafless trees swayed and creaked mournfully. The sky was clouded. Rain threatened and there was no shelter, neither had they provided themselves with umbrellas.

"One last turn," she said to herself. "And then——"

But there was no need to form resolves. Lady Sue was advancing rapidly towards her.

THE POINTING FINGER

Lady Sue alone. Her companion had disappeared.

Mrs. Ebury looked anxiously at her friend. Her eyes were dark and angry. The livid line around her lips spoke of passion tense and terrible.

She put her hand on Editha's arm and drew her rapidly along.

"For God's sake, don't speak to me, don't ask me anything! Only let us get home!"

Mrs. Ebury was a sensible woman. She said nothing. They reached the gates as the first chill drops of rain began to fall. Mrs. Ebury signalled the first passing hansom, and they got in. She gave the Pont Street address. Lady Sue leant back and closed her eyes. She was deathly white. Her friend feared she was about to faint.

"Sue, dearest," she said gently, "are you ill?"

An impatient shake of the head was the only answer. The horse was a good horse; the cab bowled swiftly and smoothly along. But before they reached Pont Street the threatened rain was falling in torrents. The driver let

THE POINTING FINGER

down the window. Mrs. Ebury leant back. In doing so her eyes fell on Lady Sue's dress. She noted that the silver chain of the chatelaine belt hung solitary against the dull black skirt. The chatelaine bag, which had formed Lady Sue's purse, and into which she had crushed the bank-notes—was gone.

That silent miserable drive was over at last. Mrs. Ebury sat by the fire in her boudoir awaiting tea, and awaiting also with consuming curiosity the appearance of her friend.

Whatever that communication had been there was no doubt that it had had an extraordinary effect upon Lady Sue. She had seemed as one stunned, distraught. As if her faculties had been paralysed. Editha felt alarmed. If only she had spoken, given any hint, but no statue could have been more silent.

Tea was brought in. She waited, wondering whether to send a message to her friend's room, or leave her to come or not as she pleased. The situation was tense and inexplicable. Yet there must be an explanation possible—a climax to the strange incongruous events of this strange day.

THE POINTING FINGER

The door opened suddenly. It was Lady Sue at last. She crossed the room and dropped into the chair beside the fire. There was colour in her face and resolution. She had fought out her trouble. Now came the question how to surmount its attendant difficulties.

It was no ordinary affair of everyday life. On the contrary, it was just what Lady Sue specially detested. A melodramatic horrible history. A series of occurrences more fitted for the Porte St. Martin stage than to a prosaic English household. Probably the story had lost nothing in the telling. Mr. O'Shea had the eloquence and powers of description for which his countrymen are renowned. In his life he had played many parts, stage villain among them. Now it had pleased him to use the reverse side of the professional shield and pose as a virtuous and repentant hero. His real reasons for repentance, of course, only concerned himself. There had been no need to explain them.

Lady Sue asked for some tea in her natural voice, and drank it in her natural manner. Then she pushed away the cup and looked at Editha Ebury.

THE POINTING FINGER

" I have told Taylor to pack," she said.
" I'm going back to Wales to-morrow."

Mrs. Ebury gave a little disappointed murmur.

" I wish I could tell you everything ! " went on Lady Sue, clasping and unclasping her hands in an odd, nervous fashion. " But I can't. It must seem horrible, and secret, and all that, but I can't help it. I feel as if what I heard must be locked up close and tight from everyone—even myself. I know it's there, I feel its dreadful weight, but I won't unlock the door and let it through to—to torment me ! "

Mrs. Ebury's pretty face grew more and more bewildered.

" Of course, my dear," she said, " you mustn't think yourself bound to tell me what that man sold to you to-day."

" *Sold !* " exclaimed Lady Sue.

" Am I not right ? "

" He asked for nothing. But I gathered he was poor. I know he has voyaged back to England in order to repair a—a great wrong. And so——"

" You assisted to pay the repairs. I

THE POINTING FINGER

thought as much, when I missed your chate-laine bag."

Lady Sue looked at her friend with wide miserable eyes. "Editha, be merciful!" she implored. "I have only you to speak to. And even to you I daren't tell everything."

Mrs. Ebury answered the appeal by clasping her friend's hand.

"Dearest Sue," she said. "Be sure I love you well enough to help you in any possible way! I can see you are in trouble. If it would help you to speak I am ready to hear. If, on the other hand, you feel it is best to be silent, I shan't bother you with questions. Now, are you really determined to return to Wales to-morrow?"

"Yes," she said; "I must."

"Your mother's letter has not yet arrived. It may come by the last post to-night, or the first in the morning. Would that letter have any effect on your decision?"

She shook her head. "None. What I do is independent of anything I may hear from the Abbey."

"Very well," said Editha Ebury. "That settles one point. For the next, my dear Sue,

THE POINTING FINGER

I am going to ask you to invite me to go back with you. I am sure you won't refuse. You have ordered your maid to pack your clothes. I will order mine to do the same for me. I shall tell Oliver that instead of Algiers or the Riviera I am going to try Welsh air. What do you say ? ”

Lady Sue looked at her with suddenly dimmed eyes. “ What can I say—except that you will be the greatest comfort possible ? I should not have dared to ask you. It is so dull and quiet at the Abbey. I'm afraid you won't like it, Editha.”

“ Nonsense ! It will be a delightful change. Sometimes I like to be quiet, and no one need be dull who has any common sense. I hope I possess some. Anyway, we'll start off to-morrow morning, and I'm at your service whenever you need me.”

“ That's good to hear,” said Lady Sue, drawing a deep breath of relief. “ I can tell you one thing, Editha, and that is that my doubts are in no way solved. For aught I know, Ronald is Lord Edensore and my cousin. This—this strange Irishman has only complicated matters. He knew Ronald : they

THE POINTING FINGER

were together in Central Africa. Then they lost sight of each other. But it's not that part of the story that troubles me. It's something quite different."

"Different from the change in your cousin, and our theories respecting it?"

"Yes."

"The whole business seems a network of complications," said Mrs. Ebury.

"You are right. I little imagined that Uncle Geoff's death would only pave the way for doubt, mystery, and dishonour."

Mrs. Ebury was silent for a moment or two.

"I cannot see any clue at present. Perhaps when I am on the ground, light will come to me. I'm considered rather good at solving problems, you know. However, the fact of this Irishman having met your cousin in Africa ought to help you with dates and circumstances. Did he tell you when and where and how they parted?"

"Yes," said Lady Sue, her lips whitening suddenly. "According to his story, if I am to believe it, Ronald cannot possibly be alive."

"My dear!" almost gasped Mrs. Ebury. "What a statement! Have you any proof?"

THE POINTING FINGER

She shook her head. "None. I don't want it, Editha. Shocking as it may seem, I would rather the mystery remained unsolved than that Jasper Mallory should find himself the head of our house and family."

"It was and is to Jasper Mallory's interest to prove Ronald's death."

"Of course," she shuddered slightly. "He has tried to encompass that death once already. He may have done it a second time——"

"Sue, think what you are saying !"

"I do think. I have a rooted conviction in my own mind respecting Jasper. He thought his way to the succession clear. Now he is getting desperate. You see, Editha, as Earl of Edensore he could resign his commission and avoid the war. As mere Captain Mallory it would be a disgrace and scandal to do so."

"And he is coward enough to love his own skin best ?" said Mrs. Ebury.

"Indeed, that's true. When you see him you will be able to judge whether I am right or not."

"I am most anxious to see him," said Mrs. Ebury. "But more than all am I anxious

THE POINTING FINGER

for the solution of this other mystery. Who is it that is personating Ronald if Ronald is dead, or a captive in South Africa? Who is suffering the penalty of that personation at the present moment?"

Lady Sue rose from her chair.

"Yes," she echoed. "Who?"

CHAPTER XV

THE expected letter from Lady Anne did not arrive till the next morning.

Lady Sue read it in her own room.

She learnt that Lord Edensore had been shot accidentally in what seemed to have been a poaching fray. The keepers were giving chase to some suspicious characters when they heard the sound of guns in the plantation. They hurried in that direction. It was late afternoon, and the dusk interfered with their movements and their search. After a long interval their dogs' barking attracted them. They found the animals beside a figure stretched on the ground. At first they imagined it was one of the poachers ; but to their amazement discovered it was their master himself.

With great difficulty they managed to convey him to the Abbey. A doctor was sent for. The young Earl had been wounded in the

THE POINTING FINGER

shoulder, the shots, fortunately, just escaping the right lung. He had bled profusely before the men had discovered him. He was very weak, and quite unable to give any particulars as to the accident. Richards was nursing and looking after him, and Jasper Mallory was most concerned and attentive. The doctor assured them there was no occasion for alarm, and the Earl had begged Lady Anne not to tell her daughter of the accident. But Lady Anne thought it only right she should know, and please herself as to whether she would return or not.

Lady Sue's face looked white and anxious as she laid the closely covered sheets down beside her.

"I'm glad I decided," she said to herself. "And this—serves as excellent excuse."

Through the long tiring journey she was very silent and preoccupied. She had shown her mother's letter to Mrs. Ebury, and they had discussed it together.

"Are poachers common to those regions?" Mrs. Ebury asked. "One has a sort of idea that the Welsh are all pious, honest, chapel-going folk with a passion for harps and the

THE POINTING FINGER

tonic sol-fa. Poachers and vagabonds don't quite harmonise with that theory ; do they ? "

But Lady Sue did not smile. The affair was not one to jest about. After the fever and wounds of his late expedition this attack on the young man's life might be of a more serious nature than anyone anticipated. Besides, she was conscious of something which invested it with a significance of which her mother and her friend were ignorant. Yet how could she thresh out the mystery of this cowardly attack ? How set the law on the heels of the offender ? No word of justice or pursuit had been in her mother's letter. Statements had been accepted without question. She felt that she would have many inquiries to make ere her mind was at rest.

" You wired, of course ? " said Mrs. Ebury, as the train drew into the little station.

Lady Sue looked blank. " I forgot all about it ! What could have possessed me ? There'll be nothing to meet us. I shall have to send Taylor to the inn for a fly."

As they stood speaking to the maid, Mrs. Ebury saw another figure at the end of the platform. There was something familiar about

THE POINTING FINGER

it despite the change made by ulster and travelling cap.

She felt certain it was O'Shea. He came slowly forward, carrying his own bag. As he neared the two ladies he raised his cap.

"Can I be of any assistance?" he inquired of Lady Sue.

She looked amazed. The last person she had expected to see was the man whom she had parted with in Regent's Park the previous day.

"Thank you—no," she said coldly. "I am sending to the inn for a conveyance."

"You are no doubt surprised to see me here," he went on. "The surprise is mutual. I had not reckoned on meeting your ladyship so soon again. I have business here. Business with Captain Mallory."

Mrs. Ebury looked astonished. Lady Sue made no remark.

"I suppose I shall find accommodation at the inn?" continued the Irishman. "This part of the country is strange to me. If your ladyship is sure I can do nothing——"

"No—no, thank you," said Lady Sue hastily. "We shall wait in the waiting-room

THE POINTING FINGER

for the carriage. Yes—you will find the inn quite comfortable. I—I suppose you have no message for Captain Mallory that I could deliver ? ”

“ I thank your ladyship. I will not trouble you. I shall write to the captain to-night.”

He lifted his cap and walked away.

“ Well ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Ebury. “ I am too surprised to express surprise. That man has followed us, I’m sure.”

“ Impossible,” said Lady Sue. “ He couldn’t have known we were coming down.”

“ Did you mention your—Lord Edensore’s accident to him ? ”

“ Yes,” she said, after some hesitation.

“ That accounts for it.”

“ I don’t see why it should. You heard what he said ? ”

“ About Captain Mallory ? Yes. That may have been an inspiration of the moment. He has the happy audacity of his nation.”

“ Well, never mind him ! ” exclaimed Lady Sue impatiently. “ Come and let us warm ourselves at the fire. It will be at least twenty minutes before that fly arrives. I wish you had reminded me, Editha.”

THE POINTING FINGER

"It was all done in such a hurry. I never thought of the necessity. They won't be expecting us?"

"No. But you can have my room, and I'll sleep in mother's for to-night."

"I wasn't thinking about the room," said Mrs. Ebury. "I am rather revelling in this adventure. The more unusual and unexpected the circumstances arising out of it, the better I am pleased."

Lady Sue stood warming her feet before the blazing fire. She thought it very nice of her friend to take the inconvenience so lightly. But the fact of her own remissness was a reminder of this new strange absorption in the momentous secret it had been her fate to discover. Taylor returned at last in the carriage, and leaving their heavy luggage to be sent on later, the two friends drove off.

Their arrival created quite a stir. Mrs. Brock was distressed at having received no intimation. Lady Anne alternated between delight at her daughter's return and lamentations over the recent tragedy.

Jasper Mallory did not appear on the scene until dinner was announced.

THE POINTING FINGER

Lady Sue had heard that the young Earl's condition was satisfactory. The shots had been extracted. There was no fever, and with quiet and rest it was expected that he would soon recover.

Mallory seemed more surprised than pleased at his cousin's advent. It was evident that he had been drinking heavily, and it cost him an effort to disguise the fact. He gave several contradictory accounts of the accident. Lady Sue's questions irritated him, and her cross-examination put his statements to confusion. No one knew how it had happened. No one had seen the poachers. The keepers had only heard there were poachers in the neighbourhood. At one moment he said that he and Ronald were out shooting together. At another that he had not touched a gun since he had been at the Abbey.

Mrs. Ebury, as one on mischief bent, persisted in innocent and misleading inquiries. She suggested tramps or gipsies instead of professional poachers. She related similar incidents, and illustrated them as fancy seemed good unto her. She declared that Sue and herself had come to nurse the hero

THE POINTING FINGER

of the accident. They would go "on duty" and take it in turns, with Taylor as an auxiliary.

When dinner was over, it was she who proposed coffee and cigarettes where they were at the table, and thus interfered with Mallory's customary libations to Bacchus. She made amends for Lady Sue's silence, and drew her mother into strange and impossible channels of small talk. Lady Anne was one of those women who revel in detail, but are exquisitely illogical. She was always charmed with Mrs. Ebury, but more charmed than ever to have her under her own eye, so to say, than to simply have glimpses of her in comet-like flights from house to house and county to county. Such had been her previous experience.

It was probably due to Mrs. Ebury's efforts that Lady Sue's silence and preoccupation were not more noticeable, and that Mallory suffered an unobtrusive footman to remove the decanters and supply him with strong black coffee.

She amused him, and distracted his thoughts. Besides, she was a very pretty woman, and a woman evidently not averse to flirtation of a kind.

THE POINTING FINGER

She had just involved Jasper in a discussion on the merits of foreign service *versus* home interests, when a footman entered the room and handed him a letter.

"The—the gentleman is waiting, sir," he observed with some diffidence.

Mallory glanced at the envelope, and the blood flew to his face. He snatched it from the salver, and forgetful of apology to those present, hastily ran his eyes over the contents. He crushed up the note in his hand.

"Waiting—did you say?"

"Yes, sir. I showed the gentleman into the library. He said he knew you would see him. He had just come from South Africa."

"South Africa!" The three women turned at the words, and all looked at Mallory. He rose and pushed aside his chair.

"Excuse me. I must see this man," he muttered, and left the room. The footman followed. Mrs. Ebury suddenly bent down and picked up the envelope which had fluttered to the floor unobserved. She laid it down on the table by Jasper's cup. Her eyes met Lady Sue's inquiry with answering significance.

THE POINTING FINGER

"I fancy it is Irish caligraphy," she said.

Lady Anne looked up in mild surprise. "My dear, how clever you must be! Fancy being able to tell the meaning of a letter by its address! I have heard graphology is a most interesting study. I suppose you have studied it?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Ebury. "I have a wonderful memory for handwriting. I never forget one that I have once seen."

"Dear me!" said Lady Anne. "I'm afraid I only remember the writing of my own relatives. I always wonder who a letter is from, and then when I read it I think how stupid not to remember. It is the same with faces. I have offended so many people because I can't remember who they are—even when they speak. Now Sue is so different. She never forgets a face that she has seen. But, of course, we can't all have the same gifts, can we?"

"Of course not. It is just that failure which makes life so interesting. If there were no stupid people, the clever ones wouldn't have a chance unless they really were clever.

THE POINTING FINGER

A great many are only a little less stupid.
But they shine—by contrast ! ”

“ Ah, yes. ‘ A little less and how much it is,’ as Browning says,” observed Lady Anne.
“ But do you think, my dear, that smoking is quite—quite good for women ? ”

The irrelevance of the question amused Mrs. Ebury, who was lighting a second cigarette.

“ I don’t know,” she said. “ We don’t consider about a thing being good or bad if we want it, or like it.”

“ And do you really like smoking ? Of course I know it’s done, and heaps of women smoke as much as men do ; but I think it must be harmful.”

Lady Sue roused herself suddenly.

“ Mother dear,” she said, “ can’t I see Ronnie to-night ? Do you think it would harm him ? ”

Lady Anne looked doubtful.

“ The doctor said he was to be kept very quiet. There’s Richards and the woman from the village, Mrs. Jones, who goes out nursing, to attend to him. I—I really think, dear, you must wait till to-morrow. It would be a pity to run any risk.”

THE POINTING FINGER

Her daughter rose from the table. She pushed her hair away from her forehead with a sudden weary gesture.

"I *want* to see him," she said. "I shall not speak—only just look in at the door. Don't worry yourself, mother. I am as anxious for his recovery as you are."

"You are so wilful, Sue darling. I know it's no use to say anything if your mind is made up. Are you going now?"

Lady Sue nodded.

Her mother sighed resignedly. She turned to Mrs. Ebury as the door closed.

"Isn't it funny," she said, "that Sue should be so anxious? And after pretending to me she didn't care a rap about Ronald! Still, if things did come round it would be very nice. A suitable arrangement in every way. Do you think—I hope it's not a breach of confidence to ask, but Sue might be more confidential to you—do you think there's any chance of her coming round to the idea? We have always thought it would be so suitable."

"It would," said Mrs. Ebury. "And that is probably why it will never happen!"

THE POINTING FINGER

"Oh, do you think so?" exclaimed Lady Anne disappointedly. "But why did she hurry home like this if—if she didn't care?"

"Why do women do the hundred and one inexplicable things they do?" asked Mrs. Ebury. "Simply, my dear Lady Anne, because they are curious, or bored, or indifferent. For no other logical reason."

Lady Anne sighed again. "I am sure you are dreadfully clever, my dear, and I don't wonder Sue is so fond of you. But I wish you could give me some better reason for her sudden interest and anxiety about Ronald?"

"Surely it is natural," said Mrs. Ebury. "He is her cousin, and they have been on brotherly and sisterly terms for so long."

She threw away her cigarette end, and rose and went over to the fire.

Lady Anne rose also. "We will go to the library," she said. "The drawing-rooms are so large and cold. I never use them when we are only a family party."

"But isn't Captain Mallory in the library with this visitor?" asked Mrs. Ebury.

"Oh, of course. I forgot. And that reminds me how curious that anyone should

THE POINTING FINGER

come here to see Jasper ! I wonder who it is ? I wonder——”

The door suddenly opened, and Lady Sue entered. With the opening of the door there came the sound of loud and angry voices raised as in dispute.

Lady Anne started. “ Dear me ! ” she said. “ What a strange noise ! One would think they were quarrelling ! ”

CHAPTER XVI

LADY SUE closed the door sharply on her mother's words. She could have confirmed them had she chosen.

Mallory and his friend were talking loudly and fiercely. She had heard O'Shea's voice as she crossed the hall to the dining-room. Heard good sound oaths rattled forth and Jasper's angry rejoinder. But at this moment it seemed to her a matter of supreme indifference. She was haunted by that pale face on the pillows ; the helpless appeal that a sick and suffering man always makes to a woman.

He had not known of her presence. She had been true to her word, and merely looked in through the half-open door. The sight of the ghastly face, the bandaged arm lying outside the bed-clothes had been a shock to her. Richards was on duty, but the nurse

THE POINTING FINGER

was in the adjoining dressing-room. She had come forward at the young lady's appearance, and whispered that the Earl was asleep. He had been feverish and restless all day. The doctor was coming again for a late visit about ten o'clock.

Satisfied with that look, and the information, Lady Sue left the room.

The sound of that angry dispute in the library greeted her on her return. She was honest enough with herself to confess it was expected. She wondered what would follow? What would Jasper do?

He was ignorant of her knowledge of his secret, that O'Shea had been his paid tool. And furthermore, neither the tool nor the employer knew her own suspicions respecting the real Ronald. She felt she would cut out her tongue sooner than give a hint to Mallory. Better a usurper than this cowardly sot! This man of intrigue and malice and murderous designs.

Yet she would have dearly liked to hear what was passing between the two men. The closing of the door had been an act of courage, so keen was her curiosity.

THE POINTING FINGER

The actual scene was worthy of the two actors in it. Mallory had commenced it with fury.

"What the devil brings you here?" he blustered. "How dare you send me such a message?"

"The only devil that brought me was me own inclinations," said the Irishman coolly. "And as for sending a message, how else would I be getting word of you?"

"But you needn't have followed it up by coming on its heels!"

"Maybe not. But you see I've had experience of your ways before this, and there's no time to waste. I heard in the village yonder that your cousin had returned on the eve of his father's death. Your cousin, Ronald, Lord Rollestone? Is that true?"

Jasper stared. "Of course it is. You blundering fool, do you pretend it's news?"

"It is news, Captain. Your cousin, Lord Rollestone, was in the hands of a native tribe—the Asshanyas—when I last saw him. They were on the eve of offering him as a

THE POINTING FINGER

sacrifice to their god. We were both to have been offered, but I escaped. He is as surely dead as ever man was!"

"*Dead!*" gasped Jasper Mallory. "Are you mad, or am I? Ronald has returned. Ronald is now the Earl of Edensore!"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed O'Shea. "I tell you I shadowed him as you—suggested. I only lost sight of him once because I hadn't money to hire a *dhow*. Then I caught him up again. He was seemingly very friendly with these natives, and they had made him free of their camp. He was in high glee over the lions he had bagged, and the blacks had a great respect for him owing to his being such a wonderful shot. But all the time they only wanted to get him into their clutches and offer him as a sacrifice, as I told you. To do this he had to be decoyed to their village and shown to the priests. I overheard this and warned him——"

"What in heaven's name for?" interposed Mallory.

The Irishman laughed contemptuously.

"Why? Simply because it was too

THE POINTING FINGER

horrible a form of death for a man who had never harmed me. We had planned to escape. He and I and a native guide who was devoted to him. But that same night the fiends set on us. We fought like madmen. It was pitch dark and a hand-to-hand *mélée*; revolvers to spears, and a knife thrust to follow. How I escaped with my life I don't know, but it was Rolleston they were after, and Rolleston was a prisoner in their hands three months ago."

"He escaped! It's a lie——"

"I'll trouble you to take back that word, Captain!" said O'Shea. "Blackguard I may be; and bedad there's a pair of us at the trade, but divil a word of a lie have I spoken this night!"

"If you escaped—why shouldn't he?"

"For the good and sufficient reason that I fell in with one of the tribe near the coast, and being disguised as a native, and clad only in a lion skin and knowing most of their dialects, got out of him the news of the great rites and sacrifices that had taken place. And the White Hunter, as they called him, was specially mentioned as being

THE POINTING FINGER

sacrificed to pacify their own special deity. Alive! I'd stake my soul he isn't. Whoever is here is foxing, that I'll take my oath. It's not your cousin."

"He is as like my cousin as a face in the glass is like the face looking at it!" exclaimed Jasper, beginning to pace the room to and fro with swift unsteady steps. "Why—man alive! I'd as soon doubt that I'm myself as that Edensore isn't Ronald."

"It's impossible!" reiterated O'Shea. "You're saying this because you want to back out of your bargain."

"You fool! If the man playing at this game wasn't safely accepted and installed and believed in, wouldn't I be Earl of Edensore at the present moment?"

O'Shea looked somewhat bewildered.

"That's true," he said. "Well, I can't make it out. Look, here's another point. I only just managed to reach England last week. I hadn't your address. I called at your Club. But they refused it. There was no letter from you at the usual place, so I went to the War Office. Learnt you were on leave, and then—well, I followed you

THE POINTING FINGER

here. I hadn't seen a paper. I knew nothing of the old man's death until Lady——"

He stopped suddenly and indulged in a violent fit of coughing. But Jasper had caught the word.

"Lady who? What do you mean?" he asked quickly.

"I mean the lady at the inn yonder," said the Irishman mendaciously. "Who else? Faith, it's not the likes of me has the acquaintanceship of titled folks! When I heard it, I said to myself, 'Now for my news, and now for a sight of his lordship's money.' Bedad, Captain, you've been near enough over that, and no mistake. It's time you made up for it."

"You ass! Can't you understand what I've been telling you? I'm not the Earl of Edensore. And whoever is masquerading is Ronald's double to the life, or Ronald himself!"

"By the living Moses, Captain, you must have been tricked by a mighty clever scoundrel entirely! I tell you again, and I shall say it while I've breath of life in my body, your cousin, Lord Rollestone, could no more be

THE POINTING FINGER

here alive and well than I could be himself at the present moment."

Jasper's temper rose. He swore and cursed and stormed. He refused to believe the story of the capture and sacrifice. How account for Ronald's receipt of the letters and cablegrams telling of his father's illness? How explain his hurried return? His acquaintance with everything in the house? His acceptance by the legal firm, who knew every member of the family?

These things were puzzling to answer, and O'Shea had no answer ready, but his conviction was unshaken.

"Well, then, you must see him for yourself!" exclaimed Jasper at last, exasperated by the man's dogged persistence. "I'll take you up to his room, and you can look at him through the door. He'll be none the wiser."

"None the wiser?" echoed O'Shea. "Oh! that reminds me. I heard of an accident. A mysterious affair it seems. What was the truth of it, Captain?"

"I know nothing except that he was shot through the shoulder," said Mallory sul-

THE POINTING FINGER

lenly. "Poachers are at the bottom of it. He's not very ill. Only, of course, the old fool of a doctor wants to make himself of importance, and there's the usual fuss of nurses, and attendance, and keeping him isolated for fear of excitement."

"Excitement would be dangerous, perhaps?"

Jasper started slightly. Something in the tone of the man's voice struck a note of warning—or suggestion.

"Of course it would. At least, so the old medico says."

"Well," said O'Shea, "'twill be an easy matter to prove the truth of what I've been telling you. If this is our man, the real Ronald as you say, he'll know me. If he's an impostor, he won't."

"Yes, but he's not conscious. He mustn't be disturbed. And he is well looked after. No chance of defying a rule of the sick-room!"

"Have you tried?"

A curious white line drew itself round Jasper Mallory's lips.

"No-o. Of course not! Why should I?"

THE POINTING FINGER

The Irishman shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, that's for you to say. You may have your reasons. There's not much love lost between you, to all appearance."

Jasper said nothing.

"Come now," said O'Shea. "Let's settle the affair once for all. I need only a look to convince me he's the right man or not. If he is, I'll believe in miracles! By me soul, Captain, but that's a deuced unpleasant picture you've got hanging there!"

He was facing the picture of the Monk, and as he faced it the light fell on the evil-looking eyes; on the outstretched hand; on the pointing finger.

Jasper turned sharply, and followed his gaze.

"It's a vile, abominable thing!" he cried. "If I had my way, it shouldn't hang there an hour longer."

"Any story about it?" inquired the Irishman.

"Oh, some absurd legend. No one with two grains of sense could believe in it."

But he kept his back turned to the strange picture, and his eyes averted.

THE POINTING FINGER

"Well, he's not the sort of gentleman I'd like to see walking in my halls," laughed O'Shea. "I could have sworn that finger moved a minute ago."

"Oh, don't be an ass!" scoffed Mallory. "It's only the way the light happens to fall. Let's get back to our subject. I'll warrant you shall see this man upstairs and settle the question of identity."

"What excuse can you give?"

"I'll say you're an old fellow-traveller anxious to see him."

"When?"

"Now. At once. The doctor usually pays a last visit at ten o'clock. We might manage to see Rollestone, or whoever he is, before he comes."

"I'm ready," said O'Shea. "The thing baffles me entirely, and I'm as anxious as yourself to set it right. We can come back here afterwards, you know, and settle the details."

Mallory gave him a black look. Details were not pleasant, and settling them meant reference to a matter singularly awkward and reprehensible.

THE POINTING FINGER

But he said nothing. He opened the door, and seeing that the hall was empty and silent, he conducted the Irishman up the staircase, across the gallery, and stopped finally at the door of Ronald's dressing-room.

He turned the handle softly and looked in. Richards was sitting by the fire reading a sporting paper.

"Where is Mrs. Jones?" asked Jasper softly as he entered the room.

"She's gone down to have her supper, sir," answered the man. "His lordship's asleep," he added.

Jasper nodded. "This gentleman is an old friend of my cousin's," he said. "They were together in Africa. He is greatly concerned at his illness. It won't do any harm if he just looks at him through the door. We shall not disturb him."

"The doctor said on no account was his lordship to be awoken."

"We shan't wake him, I promise you."

He made a sign to O'Shea, and they both moved on tiptoe to the intervening door. It was still ajar. A shaded lamp stood by the bed. Its light fell on the face of the

THE POINTING FINGER

wounded man, showing it placid and untroubled in slumber; the fair hair tossed and rumpled, the bandaged arm lying outside the white coverlet.

O'Shea gazed and gazed like one bewildered. He passed his hand over his brow, looked again, and then turned to Jasper Mallory.

"The devil's in it! 'Tis the man himself!"

"I told you so."

"Which arm is it that's wounded?" whispered the Irishman cautiously.

"The right," said Jasper.

"My man had a queer sort of mark on his wrist. 'Twas a cut, he told me. Has this one got it?"

"Not on his wrist. On his hand."

"'Twas the wrist, and the right one, I'll take my life. Could I creep up to his side and just look? I'll be careful not to waken him."

Jasper glanced over his shoulder, but Richards had returned to his paper, and was not paying any attention to the two men.

"Slip in like a mouse, then," he whispered to O'Shea, and the Irishman crept slowly, silently, into the room, and across the floor.

THE POINTING FINGER

He stooped over the sleeping man. His eyes went to the helpless arm as it lay on the coverlet. The hand was closed; the bandage had been brought down the length of the arm and twisted across the back of the hand. The wrist was completely hidden. O'Shea ventured on touching the bandage to see if it was loose. It defied his cautious fingers. Then suddenly, as if the instinct of danger gave warning to the nerve centres of defence, the young man awoke. He looked at the face of this intruder as one looks at a stranger.

"Who are you? And what do you want here?" he asked in astonishment.

CHAPTER XVII

AT sound of his master's voice, the watchful Richards sprang to his feet and hurried into the room.

"Excuse me, sir, you promised not to disturb his lordship!" he exclaimed.

O'Shea smiled oddly. "I beg his lordship's pardon. But he woke of himself. I—I'll not intrude upon him any longer."

He rejoined Mallory, who still stood at the communicating door between the bed and dressing room.

"Faith, it's a puzzle, Captain," he said. "The man yonder isn't our man at all. Either you set me on a wild-goose chase, and 'tis the wrong one I've been dodging all this time, or—we're bewitched."

"Hush!" said Mallory, in a hoarse whisper. "They'll hear you. Come along downstairs. What did he say when he

THE POINTING FINGER

woke?" he asked when they left the outer room.

"The divil a bit did he know me. He asked who I was and what I wanted."

"And Richards will tell him what you said."

"Well, that's no fault of mine. Oh, begorra, Captain, here's the ladies comin' out of the dining-room! What'll I do?"

"Come on after me. They don't know you."

"Whist—t! I was after speaking to Lady Susan at the station yonder."

"Well, what of that? Ten to one if she'll remember you!"

But to his disgust the three women turned into the library as a matter of course. Lady Sue had seen them coming down the stairs and drawn her own conclusions. Not only was she consumed with curiosity, but she was determined to baffle Jasper Mallory's scheme, if possible.

As the two men reached the hall, she turned towards them, holding the door open.

"Have you and your friend finished your business, Jasper?" she asked in a loud,

THE POINTING FINGER

clear voice. "Or do you wish to monopolise the library? If so, we'll retire to the boudoir."

Mallory looked confused. "We haven't finished," he said, "but don't let us interfere with you. We can go into the dining-room."

"The servants are clearing away," she said.

She took no notice of O'Shea. He might have been a piece of furniture for all she appeared to heed. Jasper bit his lip.

"The servants can wait, I suppose." And he walked into the dining-room.

O'Shea looked at Lady Sue. Her face was impenetrable. The scene of the previous day might never have taken place so far as she was concerned. Her indifference nettled him. It also placed him at a disadvantage. But Jasper called him angrily, and he had no choice but to follow.

"Bring some whisky and soda, and come back when I ring for you," said Mallory to the servant. He walked over to the fire-place, and taking out his cigarettes lit one and began to smoke.

"Now," he said, turning fiercely on the

THE POINTING FINGER

Irishman when they were alone. "Tell me what it all means."

"Bedad! that's just what I can't do!" exclaimed O'Shea. "I'm as puzzled as yourself, my good sir. I maintain that if the man lying on that bed upstairs is your cousin, he's not the man I followed through Central Africa. If he's not your cousin, then why is he here and recognised as such by every one of the family?"

"You fool!" hissed Jasper. "You don't mean to say you were tracking a different man?"

"He was the dead image of the man I've just seen. But that man didn't know me. You heard what he said."

"Perhaps he's not conscious, or perhaps he doesn't want to recognise you."

He pushed the whisky across the table after helping himself liberally. O'Shea followed so excellent an example before marshalling his forces for a fresh attack.

"Well, as I said before, it bates me entirely."

He put his hand into the breast pocket of his coat and pulled out a photograph. "Here," he said. "This is what you gave me, isn't

THE POINTING FINGER

it? Well, with that and the name to go upon I couldn't make much of a mistake. And this is the man who was captured by the natives, and whom I last saw bound and helpless in their hands. If he escaped it must have been by a miracle, and then what was to prevent him recognising me just now?"

Jasper swore a fierce oath. His temper was rising. The impossibility of reconciling statements with facts made him furious.

"If this fellow is playing a trick on us, by Jove! I'll make him pay for it," he said.

"But how are you going to prove it? Possession's nine points of the law, and I fail to see what use you can make of the truth! Besides—wounded and ill as he is, you wouldn't be allowed to bother him with questions. For the present there's nothing to be done. Only, as far as I'm concerned, I've fulfilled my part of the bargain, and I claim my price."

"I can't see how you've fulfilled it. I'm not Earl of Edensore yet. I can't touch a penny of the rent-roll. I'm up to my ears in debt as it is. This—impostor hates me

THE POINTING FINGER

as much as I hate him. I thought I had a chance with Lady Sue, but she's as capricious as a butterfly. So I'm stranded every way. Don't come down on me for money. I haven't any for myself, leave alone——"

"Very well, Captain. If that's the state of affairs, I must look after me own interests in another fashion!"

O'Shea rose, drank off his tumbler of whisky and soda, and replaced the photograph in his pocket.

"I won't be wastin' your valuable time any longer, Captain," he said very quietly.

"But just wish you good-evenin'."

"Stop!" cried Mallory. "What are you playing the fool for? What do you intend to do next?"

"There's such a thing as takin' one's pigs to another market. I'm thinkin' I won't have to take mine very far."

"Oh! that's the game, is it? You'll go to this fraud upstairs and round on me, will you? I advise you to think twice before you do that, my fine Paddy! Proofs aren't so easy to find as words. And if you're going to aid and abet this scoundrel in his imper-

THE POINTING FINGER

sonation there'll be two of you to cool your heels in prison before many months are over your heads."

O'Shea laughed boisterously.

"Faith, then, Captain, don't you be too sure that yourself won't be kapin' us company. Maybe it's not the sick gentleman I'll be huntin' after at all? No—but a very different sort of quarry. Yours isn't the only interest consarned, Captain Mallory. And for the matter o' that 't isn't one person only I'd be servin' by lettin' the light o' day on your miserable schemin'! Ah! ye can swear and mouth at me if ye like! When Danny O'Shea's blood's up 'tis little he cares for the likes o' you. There's for you now! Take it or lave it, 'tis all the same to me!"

The fiery spirit had flown to his head. He was in a reckless, impossible mood, caring neither for God nor man, as is the way of his countrymen when excitement gets the upper hand of prudence.

Jasper Mallory became suddenly calm and cool. He saw his danger, and he saw, too, that the tool he had chosen was a two-edged one, and hard to grapple with. Besides,

THE POINTING FINGER

if the man chose to play up to this pretender's assumption no one could prevent him. Proof lay with him. But it was proof of a peculiar kind, hard to get at or to deal with. No one could assert confidently that the present Earl was an impostor unless the real Ronald was forthcoming, or proofs of his death could be obtained. Looked at from any point of view the puzzle was complicated. But he saw plainly enough that it would be better to pacify O'Shea than to defy him.

"There—don't make an ass of yourself, man," he said to him pacifically. "What's the use of quarrelling over the mistake? Best to try and mend it—some way. I'll think matters over to-night and come round and see you in the morning. As for money, I daresay I can let you have ten pounds or so on account."

He was thinking that he had as much right to help himself to funds as the pretended heir. And the keys were in his possession now.

But O'Shea had taken to virtuous indignation, and poured contempt upon seeming generosity.

THE POINTING FINGER

"I'll not be beholden to you for a farthing that isn't fair and square with our agreement. 'Tis your interest to prove that the man upstairs isn't the rightful earl. 'Tis perhaps another person's interest to prove that he *is*. Between the two of you I stand with my proofs, and my version of the story. A story not to your credit, Captain. Then there's the gentleman himself. Oh! 'tis a mighty fine complication, and little you thought what you were bringing on your shoulders when you came sneaking round Daniel O'Shea with your hints and your lies and your money! But he's no fool, and don't you go thinking you'll fox him, for you won't!"

"Well, what do you want?" asked Mallory sullenly. "Don't fence any longer. If you're going to stand by me, say so, and I swear I'll make it worth your while. If you're not—well, take the consequences!"

O'Shea reflected for a moment or two. Should he play a double game? Should he let the traitor have a free hand until——

But then what of the other man? What of the real earl? What of Lady Susan?

THE POINTING FINGER

The situation was tense with interest ; full of complications. He felt his mood was too savage, his brain too excited to think it out to-night. Better to temporise. Better sleep on the matter, as Mallory suggested.

He looked suddenly up at his tempter.

" Before God, Captain," he said, " I think you're a clever villain, and not overburdened with scruples ! I'll take your advice, though. I'll sleep on it. Come down to the inn in the mornin' and we'll see if we can't devise a plan to put the right man in his place and give the wrong his due ! "

Mallory's brow cleared. " Ah ! you're sensible again. Believe me, it's a better paying game to stick to me. Have some more whisky ? "

" No, thank you," said the man curtly. " I'll be wishin' you good-night ; and may the night bring wisdom to both of us ! "

He walked over to the door and opened it. Jasper Mallory followed and saw him safely out into the grounds. Then he shut the great entrance door and returned to the dining-room with a smile of triumph on his lips.

THE POINTING FINGER

O'Shea walked swiftly down the drive. Midway between the shrubbery and the lodge-gates he stopped short and gave a hurried exclamation. A shadowy figure glided out from behind a belt of trees. It was too dark to see more than the outline. Face and hair were covered with the hood of the long motor cloak she wore.

"Who the devil are you?" cried the startled Irishman.

The figure advanced and came close to him.

"I—I want to speak to you," said Lady Sue's voice in agitated tones.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE Irishman was amazed. But he only masked his surprise by courtesy. He lifted his cap. "Honoured and delighted to be at your ladyship's service, he said."

"Let us walk on. Keep in the shadows. I want to know why you were taken upstairs to-night to my—cousin's room?"

O'Shea held swift counsel with himself. Should he tell her the truth, or evade a direct reply?

"How did you know I was in your cousin's room?" he parleyed.

"Richards told me. He said you professed to be a friend, that you had been together in Africa. And yet—Ronald did not know you!"

"That's true; he did not," said O'Shea.

"But why? How do you explain it? Was he conscious?"

THE POINTING FINGER

"He had his wits as clear as your ladyship or meself at the present moment."

"Then——"

She caught her breath hurriedly, and looked up in his face. The moon peering from behind a dark cloud shone down on the pale beauty of her own, and the ruffled golden hair that framed it. O'Shea's Irish blood warmed to beauty and its appeal.

"Faith, my lady," he said bluntly, "it's the sequel to the story I told you yesterday. He's not the right man at all!"

She stood suddenly still.

"How can you tell? You may have been on a false trail. You may have come across someone resembling my cousin. And——"

"And havin' the same name? And bein' as like as two peas in a pod? If we were all livin' in a story-book or play-actin' on the stage, such things might happen, my lady. But ask yourself, is it likely in rale life? Have you ever heard of such a case?"

She was silent. Her heart beat heavily. The perplexity of the situation grew with every day, with every fresh occurrence.

THE POINTING FINGER

Farce had turned to tragedy. Life faced her, grim with realities that had to be reckoned with—not evaded.

"No," she said at last. "I have never heard of one, but all the same, stranger things happen in reality than we imagine."

"Faith, this is strange enough to puzzle Solomon himself," said O'Shea. "Here's Captain Mallory waitin' to step into somebody's shoes and call himself an earl. And here's somebody kapin' him out o' them same shoes and yet he's not the rightful earl either! What are we to do, madam, at all?"

"Oh! won't you help me?" she cried suddenly. "You can see for yourself how I'm situated. I daren't breathe my suspicions to a soul. My mother hasn't the faintest idea of them, nor Jasper Mallory either. Oh! if only I had a friend whom I could trust, whom I could rely upon——"

The little break in her voice, the choking sob she repressed, went straight to the susceptible heart of the Irishman.

"I'd ask no greater honour than to be your ladyship's friend, and serve you body

THE POINTING FINGER

and soul ; but how the devil am I to do it ? Here I'm in the captain's pay—not that I've seen the colour of his money. It's his interest, of course, that Lord Rollestone should not succeed to the title and estates. It's also his interest to prove that the present gentleman is a decayver and a fraud. But by the powers o' glory 'tis mighty difficult to do one or other. One of the two is safe established and acknowledged. Where the other is, God above only knows. In kingdom come, I'm thinking. He hadn't an hour's chance of his life when I last set eyes on him."

" You think it's quite impossible that he could have escaped ? That this—gentleman—is the Lord Rollestone you knew in Africa ? "

" Well, my lady, I'm willin' to give him the benefit of the doubt. It's true for you he didn't recognise me. But there's another sign ye might go upon. The gentleman I knew and was companioning with had an ugly scar across the wrist of his right hand. Has this friend o' yours upstairs there got such a scar ? If so, he's the right man."

THE POINTING FINGER

Lady Sue drew a quick breath.

"Are you sure it was on the wrist—not the back of the hand?"

"The wrist, my lady. I'd stake my life on it!"

Lady Sue's head drooped suddenly. Her case was hopeless. She knew it at last.

"What can we do?" she said brokenly.
"What ought we to do?"

"I don't need words to tell me that your ladyship's none too anxious to have that blackguard of a captain rulin' it over you here," said O'Shea. "But right's right; and for the life o' me I can't see how the matter is to go on without some sort of a 'show up'!"

"Is there no way of communicating with that tribe—of ascertaining what really was Lord Rollestone's fate?" she asked.

As she said it, as her lovely eyes looked up at him and her voice trembled in entreaty, all the latent chivalry of O'Shea's Irish nature sprang to life. He had been a scoundrel and adventurer. He had gambled and drank and generally fooled away golden opportunities of life. He

THE POINTING FINGER

had been reckless and irresponsible, and yet through it all had kept aglow one little spark of respect and admiration for a true woman. The innocent self-betrayal of this lovely creature touched him to the very core. He knew why she was so anxious to believe in the pretensions of this mysterious stranger. And why she was equally anxious to do no wrong to the real man whose place had been usurped for some reason unknown.

Perhaps she hardly guessed how she had betrayed her real feelings in the matter. O'Shea wondered if he could settle affairs to her satisfaction? If he could set Jasper at defiance while outwardly seeming to serve him. The possibility of the whole scheme flashed before him in a moment. For he alone could do this thing. He knew the ground to travel. The secret method of getting on the track of that cruel and bloodthirsty tribe into whose hands he and Rollestone had fallen. True, there was attendant risk and danger, but such things were the breath of life to him; and then—he would for once in that life be in-

THE POINTING FINGER

cursing them in a good cause—the cause of a lovely high-born woman; this queenly creature whose pride and whose contempt of himself had rather stung than angered him. Supposing he proved to her that he was not so contemptible after all; that he, too, could be self-sacrificing, self-reliant. Supposing——

He broke off.

His thoughts had led him along a tortuous road. Now they suddenly illuminated it. How plain, how clear, how possible it looked!

He had told Mallory that the one way to settle the question was to produce the real Lord Edensore, or find authentic proof of his death. To-morrow he would offer himself as the investigator of both. Thus he could serve Lady Susan and keep Jasper Mallory still in his power. It would be useless to turn on the new possessor and deny his rights. But it was possible in three or four months at the furthest, to bring proof that would substantiate or destroy his claims. His heart beat high. He felt the old thrill, the old zest awakened.

THE POINTING FINGER

"Listen," he said suddenly, and turned to the girl by his side, and seized her cold hands and held them fast. "I've found the way, I've found the man. You said you wanted a friend to rely upon. Well, he's here, speakin' to you at this present moment. Only say the word. Only tell me that you are able to equip a search party, with Daniel O'Shea as its leader, and faith we won't let the grass grow under our feet. Dead or alive, you shall have the rale Earl of Edensore back amongst you all, ere four months have passed over our heads, or news of his fate."

Lady Sue's face flushed warmly. "Do you mean it—do you really mean it? Am I to trust you? You're not playing me against Captain Mallory for—for some purpose?"

He dropped her hands. His voice was bitter as he answered: "I might have guessed 'twould go hard for any decent man or woman to believe in me. But as there's a God above us, as there's a loving mother watching over her ne'er-do-weel in glory yonder—so do I swear and promise

THE POINTING FINGER

to fulfil my word to you! More I can't say."

"Oh, I believe you—I do believe you!" she cried passionately. "And may Heaven bless you for that promise. How I shall count the days! And as for—for the money for the expedition, let it be my affair. Don't ask Captain Mallory."

"My dear lady, the captain would scarcely credit me with such magnanimity as would go to the putting pocket and life at the service of his lost cousin without some very excellent reason. Besides, 'tis he who ought to pay me for my services. However, that's no matter just now. I'm thinkin' of your ladyship, out and alone so late. Won't they be wondering about you up beyant?"

"Oh, I can get in and not be seen!" she exclaimed. "There is a side entrance I can use. I had to risk something. I could not let affairs rest as they are. I suppose you said nothing to Captain Mallory about our interview in town?"

"Divil a word. I mentioned only seein' you at the station. When your ladyship

THE POINTING FINGER

showed no sign of recognition I took my cue. But now all is arranged I won't be kapin' you out this cold night. I'd like to think you trust me. It's no easy errand I'm going on, and what I do I do for your sake more than the rights of the case. And when I leave here to-morrow 'twill be long enough before I trouble you."

"But I must hear! I must know!" she exclaimed eagerly. "And supposing Captain Mallory won't agree to paying your expenses you must let me know at once. I can't expect you to undertake such a journey without the—the sinews of war!"

O'Shea gave a short laugh. "It's the first time in my life," he said, "that I'd like to say 'no' to that offer. But time's precious, and suspense is poor food to live upon, so I'll promise to tell your ladyship if I need your assistance."

"Thank you," she said simply. "I know you are doing this out of pure kind-heartedness. Believe me, I shall always feel your debtor. If—if you succeed——"

"Oh, I'll succeed, never fear!" he answered. "I don't promise to bring your

THE POINTING FINGER

cousin home again, but you shall know of his fate. There's one thing that gets over me. I don't know if your ladyship can explain it. There wasn't twins by any chance? Two sons of the late earl? For, faith, those two men are just the mortal image of each other."

Lady Sue drew her hood more closely round her face. "No," she said. "My cousin Ronald was the only son."

"Well, it's quare enough to be a coincidence. Your ladyship's going? I wish you good-night."

"And I wish you God-speed, Daniel O'Shea; may your quest be successful."

She held out her hand. He looked at her, then took it, dropped on one knee, and raised it to his lips.

"God send you peace and happiness, my lady," he said very low.

When he rose she was disappearing in the gloom and the distance, but it seemed to him that the night still held the echoes of her voice, the soft questioning of her deep eyes, the gleam of her golden hair.

CHAPTER XIX

JASPER MALLORY strode into the breakfast-room next morning with a brow of thunder. He dashed a formidable looking official letter upon the table, and swore both loud and deep, at the authorities at the War Office, and all connected therewith. In brief, the gallant officer's leave was countermanded, and he was ordered to the Front with no more ceremony than those in authority ever deem fit to display in dealing with those who are not.

The shears of Fate had cut sharply into his schemes. He was caught in an impasse from which there was no way out save one which would brand him coward and traitor in face of all the world. But words convey no adequate idea of his rage, or his helplessness. Here he was fettered by obligations; compelled to leave the Hall, and to leave a

THE POINTING FINGER

usurper in possession of what he considered his own rights. To speak his suspicions would only proclaim him fool. No one would believe him. And well enough he knew also that no one would regret his absence. The three women looked disgusted at his comments and his abuse. Not one of them uttered a word, and the significance of their silence was eloquent of their feelings.

He turned on them at last. "You are certainly sympathetic. One would think I was a total stranger instead of holding right and title here. I have a mind to chuck up the whole business after all!"

Lady Anne looked up from the tea-cups. Even her usually calm face wore a flush of shamed indignation.

"Pray, Jasper, remember you owe something to the honour of the family," she said. "We may have numbered sinners and evil-doers among our records, but at least they have sinned as men, not as cowards!"

"In a day and hour when England has need of every aid her sons can give, Captain Mallory's remarks savour somewhat of non-patriotism," observed Mrs. Ebury. "I have

THE POINTING FINGER

occasionally regretted that nature made me a woman. The regret has a special meaning—now.”

“That’s all very fine,” sneered Jasper. “Anyone can brag who’s on the safe side of the fence. You’d sing a different song once you’d had a taste of the hardships of war. Glory and patriotism are fine-sounding words, but they’re only the veneer for time-servers and political bunglers. This war is a political blunder. It’s been a series of mistakes from first to last. It will be an historical record of disgrace. It’s a pity that the bunglers can’t go to the Front themselves. We’d see how they’d like the result of their pettifogging cheese-paring policy.”

“I should advise you to express your opinions to the War Office authorities,” said Lady Sue icily. “To my thinking, and in the present crisis of affairs, they are simply unwarrantable.”

She rose from the table. Her heart was beating painfully. It seemed such wonderful good fortune she could scarcely credit it. The ground to be cleared in this fashion. Time allowed for thought, for plan, for action.

THE POINTING FINGER

The man's pitiful cowardice filled her with disgust. She felt as if she could not endure his presence another moment.

Just as she reached the door he called to her.

"You needn't carry the joyful news to the—interested invalid," he said. "Excitement is bad for him."

"Is that why you took a stranger to see him last night?" she asked scornfully. "You show a keen appreciation of accidents, Jasper."

His lips whitened, but the door closed ere he found words to reply to the seeming taunt. He only faced Mrs. Ebury's mocking eyes and Lady Anne's astonished ones.

"If you feel there is any immediate fear of your health breaking down, I daresay Dr. Jones would give you a certificate," observed Editha. "Such things are often done, you know. And really, military honours are not worth considering as pitted against the importance of landed interests."

He stared at her with sulky rage, and devoted himself to his breakfast. No man, even a

• THE POINTING FINGER

coward, likes to appear a coward before a woman. He was annoyed that he had allowed his temper to get the better of him. It had been the quite natural result of a fit of natural rage when he had read that command from headquarters. But suddenly he felt that rage was useless. Fate had played him a sorry trick, and he would be forced to run attendant risks even as other men were running them.

But he must see O'Shea and decide on a plan for ousting this impostor upstairs before going to London. His brain was busy over various schemes as he ate and drank in sulky silence, and the moment he had finished his breakfast he started for the village, driving himself there in a light T-cart and catching O'Shea at his own breakfast.

He relieved his mind of the news, and of a considerable amount of bad language. O'Shea said very little. He was too surprised at the fortunate happening, as well as too busy thinking over the methods of his own scheme. In the end, when Mallory had exhausted his vocabulary of oaths and

THE POINTING FINGER

complaints, he diplomatically introduced the subject of the proposed search for the real Earl of Edensore.

Jasper stormed furiously. He was all for denouncing the false claimant and asserting his own rights. It would serve a double purpose, for no one could then blame him for resigning his commission. "Urgent private affairs" would be excuse enough. This method, however, was far from suiting O'Shea's plans or ideas. He opposed it with every possible obstacle. Desertion at such a time would brand Jasper "coward" in the face of all men, whether in or out of military circles. It would serve no purpose, as there was nothing to prove that the real Lord of Edensore was anyone but the accepted inmate of the Hall.

Jasper could not but acknowledge this. Rage and storm as he might, circumstances were too strong for him. He was neither skilful enough to untie the knot of complications, nor bold enough to sever it with one stroke of decision. He paltered and parleyed and bargained until O'Shea lost all patience, and swearing at him as coward

THE POINTING FINGER

and miser both, bade him find another tool for his dirty work.

Then Mallory grew alarmed. Things had advanced so far that he could not alter their position. He was as much in the power of O'Shea, as O'Shea was bound to his schemes. Each had need of the other, and acknowledged obligation while detesting its motive power. Finally O'Shea had his way. Mallory promised him the money for his proposed expedition, though how he was to obtain it he had no very definite idea. In a few months it might be possible to obtain the necessary proofs. For those few months Mallory determined on a career of blameless caution. Even captivity showed possibilities of safeguarding a valuable existence from shot or shell, or ill-fortunes of warfare. He deemed that he owed a certain duty to his own precious personality, seeing that it might hold important issues. It would be no very difficult matter to exercise needful precautions for a time. O'Shea, noting how his inclinations lay, fooled him to the top of his bent. All the Irishman wanted was a clear field, and a certain amount of time and money.

THE POINTING FINGER

These things were all forthcoming, and the latent spark of chivalry fanned into a blaze by Lady Sue's beauty and Lady Sue's trust emboldened him to work with a decision and energy that left Jasper Mallory at his mercy.

The interview closed with an agreement between the two men to travel to London by the night mail.

Left to himself, O'Shea held brief counsel. He must inform Lady Sue of what had happened. But how was he to do it? He could not go to the Abbey, or loiter in the grounds on chance of seeing her. Should he write? He did not favour written communications as a rule. They were unsafe, and they were compromising. He marshalled his plans before his mind's eye, acknowledging their increased difficulty owing to the outbreak of the war.

Supposing he were unable to pursue inquiries? Once in those wild uncivilised regions, he would have to face innumerable difficulties such as civilisation wots not of. But his word was given. It did not occur to him to break it. After long consideration, he wrote a few guarded lines to Lady Sue

THE POINTING FINGER

telling her of his recent interview, of his departure for London, and of an address there where he would await further communication.

Events were in train. Circumstances bore a favourable aspect. The mystery of the doubles appealed to his curiosity as well as to his interests. Besides, adventure was the very life of the man. Here it promised itself set around with excitement and danger ; the gratitude of a lovely woman, the overthrow of a villain's schemes. It was good transpontine melodrama, and O'Shea rubbed his hands with glee and paced the room feverishly, longing with all his heart for action ; for the eventful moment ; the fateful opportunity that should call forth energy and applaud triumph. He had the actor instinct of his countrymen ; the love of glory and distinction ; the faculty of devising situations and commanding them. And nothing in his eventful and unmeritorious career had appealed to him as did this strange and difficult mission, this playing a double part for a single purpose, this view of himself as a chivalrous defender of the helpless and per-

THE POINTING FINGER

secuted, and at the same time as the avenger of a fraud.

"Bedad, but it's glorious!" he exclaimed, pausing a moment in his triumphal march and appealing to an invisible audience. He halted and laughed aloud. "I'll play the man and the conqueror to the end! To think of that cur having to face the bullets of the Boers, and I to sail triumphant in at the tail of the story with the rightful man for company! But wait—let me think. For all the clamour for justice wasn't there a something in my lady's manner that seemed to convey her real interest was with that wounded man beyond? Not her words, but her looks. The tremor of her voice, the appeal in those beautiful eyes. Faith! Daniel O'Shea, those same eyes made your tough heart melt like ice before the sunlight."

He sighed involuntarily. He thought of his sudden impulse; his wild plan; the perils and the hardships to which he had vowed himself for the sake of those same beautiful eyes. In colder, calmer mood he faced undreamt-of difficulties, but they could not

THE POINTING FINGER

damp his ardour. Some natures answer to the spur of danger as the mettlesome steed to the spur of his rider. O'Shea's was such a nature.

Inaction was positive misery. How to get through the hours of this long day suddenly faced his aroused energies with a sense of wasted opportunities. Why should he wait? Why should he burden himself with Jasper Mallory's unwelcome society? There was an earlier train. He would take it, and be in London that night. True, he could not do much, but the fact of being on the ground would be a relief to enforced inaction.

He took up the letter for Lady Sue, resolving to post it on his way. His packing and the settling of his bill occupied but a very short time.

At midnight of that same day Daniel O'Shea was walking through the London streets. At midnight of that same day Jasper Mallory was whirling through the dark and dreary country; mind and brain a sottish duality. To him life meant only schemes that had been circumvented; harsh circum-

THE POINTING FINGER

stances he was forced to accept. A blind rage held the forces of his body as fetters hold a prisoner; and if curses do come home to roost, he assuredly had a sorry future before him.

But unknown to both men there was a new force brooding in the darkness and mystery around them.

CHAPTER XX

FATE has many moods, and works by strange means.

It had seemed a mere impulse to O'Shea that directed his selection of an earlier train. A similar impulse sent him wandering through the streets of London, by reason of that up-stirring of aroused forces which forbade physical inaction. He found himself in the Strand at the time when the theatre crowds were pouring into the streets, and cabs and motors and omnibuses adding to the confusion. Here and there some shivering out-cast or dreary painted tawdriness looked up at more fortunate fellow-beings. Here and there a small grimed hand held out its forlorn stock of matches or evening papers. Here and there a voice whined for charity, while a furtive glance watched its foe, the policeman, at least out of hearing if not out of sight.

THE POINTING FINGER

The whole pitiable, never-ending wretchedness of the midnight streets spread out its panorama of contrasts. Wealth and pleasure, sordid misery and crime jostled each other for brief ugly moments, and then fell each into their apportioned place in the strange scheme of civilisation.

O'Shea strolled on, and had reached Wellington Street when he caught sight of a ragged figure making a sudden plunge to cross the road. He had chosen a bad moment, and as O'Shea watched the unsteady progress, he saw a hansom advancing swiftly in that direction.

What impelled him to the rashness of pursuit and rescue he was never able to imagine. All he knew was that he had dragged the staggering pilgrim almost from under the horse's feet, and was holding him in safety on the vantage-ground of a street shelter.

A poor forlorn figure it was, at which policemen cast rough words, and on whom waiting pedestrians vented reproach and blame. The rescuer looked with some pity at the shivering form. Then suddenly the ghastly face lifted itself, and the piteous eyes met his own.

THE POINTING FINGER

There was something scared and furtive in the glance. O'Shea dropped the arm he had been holding. "My God!" he cried. "Who *are* you?"

There was no answer, no sign or sense of recognition. The Irishman seized the trembling arm once more and piloted the poor outcast across the road. Once on the pavement, he steadied the figure, and again put that question. The only response was a melancholy shake of the head—a feeble muttering.

O'Shea spoke gently and persuasively. Incredible as it seemed to himself, he yet felt convinced that the object of his purposed journey was attained. That here in the heart of London he was face to face with the man he had last seen in an African forest.

"For Heaven's sake, speak!" he entreated. "Do you remember me? Aren't you Rollestone? Ronald Rollestone, who was with me in the Zambesi?"

The man gazed vacantly at his interlocutor, and began to tremble violently. With a sudden effort he wrenched his arm from O'Shea's detaining grasp, and made a dash forward in the direction of the Bridge.

THE POINTING FINGER

In a moment the Irishman was level with him, and once again seized his arm.

"Don't be frightened, man ! I won't harm you," he said hurriedly ; for that dash for freedom had aroused interest amongst the passers-by, and sundry loafers were gathering round.

He seized the hand of his captive and searched its surface for that scar he remembered. It would be proof sufficient of identity—puzzling as were the circumstances. Amidst grime and attenuation there it lay—crossing the back of the wrist ; a jagged cruel line, not easy to forget.

"You *are* my old chum—you are Ronalds," exclaimed O'Shea. "How on earth did you get here ? Don't you remember me ?"

A shake of the head, a piteous glance, were the only answer. O'Shea's heart gave a quick throb. He saw that the poor outcast had been almost deprived of his senses. He had no power of recognition—scarcely of speech. The mere instincts of terror and self-preservation alone seemed to survive in his wrecked and feeble mind. Some terrible fate must have been his thus to rob him of

THE POINTING FINGER

strength and memory—almost of likeness to the brave glad youth O'Shea so well remembered.

"Come," he said gently. "Don't be so frightened. I won't hurt you. Can't you tell me where you live?"

Still there was no answer. Only that shake of the head—that furtive glance to right and left, as of some trapped creature seeking release.

The Irishman saw he was in terrible plight. Wasted to a skeleton—his memory gone—moneyless—starving—and alone in this great city. Of a former existence—of rightful name or place in the world—he seemed totally unconscious. His present physical needs made all else subordinate. Perhaps with rest—food—care, his senses might return. At least they were conditions imperative on any effort at restoring mental balance, or even semblance of humanity.

O'Shea spoke to him gently and soothingly. At last he was persuaded to accompany his new friend to some place of shelter. O'Shea threw his own overcoat over the ragged figure, and drew him gently in the

THE POINTING FINGER

direction of a coffee stall. Here he gave the famished man food, and tried again to soothe his terrors and assure him of friendliness. Then he took him to his own hotel in Buckingham Street, and got him up to his own room. Once there, he ordered a fire and hot bath, and tended the poor wanderer as gently as a woman. Dressed in clean linen, and laid between clean sheets, the forlorn creature gave a few deep sighs of content, and fell asleep.

O'Shea threw his rags aside into a cupboard, made up the fire, and sat there for long pondering over events and wondering what his next course of action should be.

That the man was the same Lord Rolleston he had last seen in Africa he had no doubt. But how he had escaped from that savage tribe and made his way back to his native land was a mystery beyond his discoverer's powers of imagination.

"By the saints in glory, how am I going to prove he is the right man?" he asked himself. "Sure, his wits are all astray, and his mind's gone, and as for the likeness — damme if the wrong man hasn't

THE POINTING FINGER

the best of it now! Was ever such a predicament?"

He stood by the bed and looked long and thoughtfully at the wasted features of the sleeper. There were dark shadows beneath the closed lids; a hectic flush on the thin cheeks. The breathing was quick and irregular; the hands outside the quilt twitched nervously.

O'Shea's face grew very grave. "He looks ripe for an illness," he muttered. "And that sets the clock back again. I seem to get no farther. If only he could tell me about himself 'twould clear the way a bit. Anyhow, this stops the African project. No use looking for my needle in that haystack. And what will I be telling the captain? He mustn't know of this, anyway."

The night passed on to grey dawn while he fought his way through a maze of conjecture and tried to formulate a new plan of action.

He would have to see Mallory at his hotel. He would have to fall in, or seem to fall in, with his directions. The question was, would the captain trust him with money?

THE POINTING FINGER

As likely as possible he would not. He would perhaps insist on taking his passage for him, and O'Shea thought ruefully of good money wasted should he be compelled to avail himself of the pilot's services. Then there was Lady Sue. She must be let into the secret even as Jasper Mallory must be kept in the dark. Altogether, the Irishman's brain was in a ferment, and sleep became impossible.

Towards daybreak the sick man began to toss restlessly on his pillows. His face was very flushed. The dark shadows under his eyes were like a bruise. Suddenly he woke and sat up. He was trembling violently, and his eyes were wide with terror. O'Shea hastened to his side.

"Well, friend," he said, "how do you find yourself?"

The man raised one shaking hand to his head. "I'm on fire," he muttered. "It is everywhere around me. Ugh!—how the flames scorch—burn—burn—burn——"

He shuddered as if he felt their touch. He was back with the tortures and terrors of that awful time.

THE POINTING FINGER

O'Shea felt alarmed. The man was seriously ill, in the grasp of fever, and in his present condition could give no account of himself. He resolved to send for a doctor as soon as anyone was stirring. Meanwhile he applied cool bandages to the fevered head, and did his best to soothe the man to sleep once more. At last he sank into a heavy stupor, and lay quite still save for an occasional moan or sigh.

When a doctor arrived and heard O'Shea's story, he looked very grave. The man was emaciated as a skeleton. He must have endured terrible hardships, and he was now in the grip of fever born of swamps and miasma and scorching heats and chill dews. The issue was uncertain, but the chances were against recovery.

"He ought to have a nurse; he must not be left alone for a moment," concluded the medical authority. "I will send one in, and some medicine. For the present we can do but little. The fever must run its course."

Then he left, and O'Shea shrugged philosophical shoulders, and since things could

THE POINTING FINGER

be no worse, set about trying to make them better.

To assert that this forlorn and destitute wanderer was the Earl of Edensore was a statement that would need more substantial proof than his bare word. He was altered almost beyond recognition to anyone who had only known the well-groomed, well-set-up young Englishman of University days. As O'Shea had affirmed already, the present possessor looked infinitely more like the former Lord Rollestone than did the real man. But for the Irishman's own memory of the unkempt and vagabond appearance they had both presented in those wild days of travel and adventure, he might have passed him without recognition.

In another hour, when his matted locks had been cut close, and ice applied to his head, and the room put into the orderly condition peculiar to nursing prerogatives, O'Shea felt that he had done all that was possible.

He took an adjoining room for himself, had a bath and some breakfast, and then awaited the summons which he felt confident

THE POINTING FINGER

was on its way from Jasper Mallory. In due course it arrived, and also in due course O'Shea waited on the sender for instructions. That they were seasoned with forcible and not too polite recriminations, goes without saying.

Fortunately Jasper's own affairs demanded all his spare time and attention. He was obliged to pay his supposed emissary in advance, and trust to his promise to find the real "Ronald," dead or alive. That matter settled, the valiant warrior gave his whole attention to hygienic garments and "bullet-proof" shirting, an ingenious contrivance patented by an American inventor, and purposing to be on the lines of ancient "chain armour."

O'Shea troubled himself no more about the white-livered warrior. In a week Mallory had sailed for Cape Town, ignorant that his supposed tool remained behind; ignorant that the cousin whom he hated as an interloper was in the very country he had left. Equally ignorant that the money he had so sorely grudged and which he had obtained from Lady Anne herself, was being spent

THE POINTING FINGER

in the service of the very individual whose death he craved and for whose title and position he was ready to perform any villainy.

Meanwhile, in a small upper room of that Strand hotel, O'Shea watched and tended the sick man.

The fever was not violent. Wasted frame and wasted energy were incapable of opposing a drastic force. A stronger man might have suffered more, but in this poor citadel of want and woe there was little to set itself against an enemy, and Nature proved her own curative powers by taking the line of least resistance. In a week the fever had abated, the temperature had become normal, and pain and restlessness had sunk into lethargy.

Then O'Shea wrote to Lady Sue. He had not cashed her cheque, neither had he given her any information respecting his strange discovery. But with the departure of Mallory he felt the decks were cleared for necessary action. The letter gave him some difficulty. In cold plain words the story of his discovery looked improbable; a fantasy of sensational effects. Would she

THE POINTING FINGER

be able to believe in it? To credit that O'Shea had stumbled upon the lost heir in a London street instead of in the wilds of Africa? That with everything prepared for enterprise and adventure, the bathos of commonplace had stepped in and turned a hero into a mere craftsman of chance?

He wrote and rewrote and wrote again. But the effect remained the same. The one thing to which he could swear most confidently was the scar on the right hand. But that scar had not been there when Ronald, Viscount Rollestone, had set forth on his travels.

In the end O'Shea sent off his letter in a mood of irritation with his poor powers as a scribe. But when it was posted he was conscious of a certain relief. Some of his responsibility was shunted for the time being.

Would Lady Sue come to town herself? Would she recognise the sick man as the rightful Lord Edensore, and if so, what of the claimant in possession?

CHAPTER XXI

LADY SUE read O'Shea's letter with the most complete sense of bewilderment. A second perusal had the effect of sending her to Editha Ebury for counsel. She felt both mentally and physically incapable of taking in this extraordinary communication, or acting upon its suggestions.

Mrs. Ebury also read the letter with astonishment. When one has located a difficulty some hundred of miles away it is somewhat surprising to find it at one's door.

Lady Sue's impetuous, "What am I to do?" flashed out as she laid down the letter, and found no immediate answer.

They stood facing one another, and between them lay the written sheets that had caused O'Shea so much thought and trouble.

THE POINTING FINGER

"To do——" echoed Mrs. Ebury. "It is not easy to advise at such short notice, but I should say—eventually—you must go and see this other man. He will have to be reckoned with sooner or later, and if his condition is as critical as Mr. O'Shea declares it to be, then your visit of identification should be——"

"Rather sooner than later?" interposed Lady Sue.

"Exactly."

There was a long silence. The thoughts of both were busy with the curious complications that had to be unravelled.

Mrs. Ebury spoke at last. "Our invalid upstairs is progressing favourably. There is no more need for anxiety. You can run up to town as soon as you please."

"I know that. But supposing I can't—well, can't decide? You read what O'Shea says. How awfully changed the man is; health shattered, memory gone. The same difficulty will face me again."

"You mean we shall be no nearer a decision than we are at present?"

"Of course we shan't. Until this wanderer

THE POINTING FINGER

can give a history of his actions, or proofs of his identity."

"I suppose there can't be a third double," mused Mrs. Ebury. "It is the very queerest thing I have ever come across. Shall you tell Lady Anne?"

"Not yet. It would only confuse and distress her. Editha, doesn't it strike you as odd that O'Shea felt so sure of going to Africa and then stumbles across his man almost on his arrival in London?"

"Very odd," said Mrs. Ebury. "You see he calls attention to it."

Lady Sue glanced at the letter again. Then sighed wearily.

"Thank Heaven, Jasper isn't here!" she said. "Editha—shall I go to-morrow?"

"It would save prolonged suspense. I'll accompany you. My visit here has been quite a long one."

"I don't know what I should have done without you! But you are right. When a thing has to be done the less delay the better."

"Yes. And there's nothing to fear from—poachers, or housebreakers now," said

THE POINTING FINGER

Mrs. Ebury. "Our interesting invalid bears a charmed life, it seems. Do you know, I'm consumed with curiosity to know how all this will end. Who is to have the *coup de grâce*? Who is to be proved a fraud, and who the right man? It is the most exciting thing that has ever come in my way. No novel from Mudie's can touch it for sensational effects."

"And the *dénouement* has yet to happen," sighed Lady Sue. "Certainly I have had enough of sensation and surprises to last for the rest of my natural life! Come, let us go and pack. It will be something to do. How it does rain here!"

"Lord Edensore is to come downstairs to-day, to the library, is he not?" asked Editha.

"Downstairs — yes. But not to the library. He seems to share the family dislike in that respect. The doctor said he might come down, if he wished, after luncheon."

"He will be surprised at your sudden departure."

"Or—relieved," said Lady Sue, as she

THE POINTING FINGER

slowly mounted the staircase with that ominous letter in her hand.

Lord Edensore did not come downstairs till nearly tea-time. They sat in the hall before a huge wood fire which made pleasant contrast to the howling storm raging without. The invalid lay back in a big cushioned chair, and was waited upon by Lady Sue and her friend.

He looked very white and frail, and spoke but little. The outrage and its perpetrators were still a mystery, though occasional arrests had been made, and occasional suspicions—unverified. The young man himself never alluded to the subject. The very mention of it seemed an annoyance.

Lady Anne poured out tea, and incidentally remarked on the approaching departure of her daughter and her friend. The news seemed to startle the invalid. It was certainly a sudden determination. But Lady Sue offered no reason or explanation. In fact, she scarcely spoke at all. Mrs. Ebury and Lady Anne had the conversation almost to themselves.

But from time to time the girl felt those

THE POINTING FINGER

sad eyes upon her face ; and knew that no movement or action escaped their notice. They made her restless and uncomfortable. She was conscious of erecting barriers between herself and inevitable perplexities. She knew that any sort of explanation was impossible at present, but all the same she was haunted by the idea that such explanation was at hand ; that her supposed cousin had something to reveal, and was anxious only for an opportunity to do it. The sense of evading it was a distinct relief. The effort to appear her natural self in this one presence had become harder of late. His helplessness made that appeal to the softer side of her nature, a man's helplessness always does make to a woman. He was so patient, so dependent, so grateful, that she was perpetually reminded of qualities lacking in another personality, and perpetually questioning her reasons. Now at last this mystery would be set at rest. Of the blank in her own life possible to the solving of the said mystery she dared not think. The gambler's last stake is always to be the successful one. He is not

THE POINTING FINGER

capable of regarding it otherwise than hopefully.

Try as she might to send her thoughts on other errands, Lady Sue was only too conscious of how persistently they fluttered back to one special resting-place. But when she had left that place behind her she resolved never to return unless these tormenting doubts were solved ; unless she could say to this strange claimant, " I know who you are—not. Tell me who you are."

Lady Sue and Mrs. Ebury drove to Buckingham Street the next night, and O'Shea received them in a private sitting-room of the dreary hotel type.

He was strangely excited. The improbability of his story faced him at every turn. He hardly expected anyone to credit it. When he spoke to Lady Sue, when he explained his meeting with the distraught, beggared creature whom he declared to be Lord Edensore, he was not surprised at her passive reception of the story. The improbabilities of real life are the despair of fiction-makers.

THE POINTING FINGER

However, consciousness of his own rectitude fortified him for the ordeal he had himself challenged. Facts had narrowed themselves into the simple question of identification, and on Lady Susan that responsibility rested.

He took her up the stairs and into the room where the sick man lay. A small, barely furnished place, with that indescribable odour of medicine and disinfectants which so disturbs the nerves of the healthful.

The nurse rose as they entered. She looked with some curiosity at the beautiful girl and her strange companion. Lady Sue's face changed colour as her eyes fell on the quiet figure on the bed. She could not grasp the details of her surroundings. All her mental forces were concentrated on that wan white face lying on the pillows. The instant she saw it, the instant those vacant blue eyes looked back to hers, she felt this was the real Ronald. Why—she could not have explained, but the recognition came like a shock that shook the fibres of memory and associations as nothing in that other man had ever shaken them.

THE POINTING FINGER

Wonderful as the likeness was, yet here she recognised those subtle differences which stamp each human creature as a separate and distinct entity. The shape of the head, the curve of the cheek, the weakness of the chin, these she knew as familiar things. In that other impersonator they had been more a suggestion of likeness than an actual reality.

She stared in dumb wonder, and then softly breathed his name. "Ronnie!"

He moved his head uneasily, as if listening. She repeated the word. But he gave no sign of memory or of recognition.

"He does not know me," she faltered, turning to the nurse.

"He knows no one, madam," she answered quietly. "His mind seems quite gone."

O'Shea came a step nearer. "Was I right?" he asked.

"Yes—I am sure it is Ronnie. But how came he in such a plight as this?"

"Ah! if I could tell you that, I'd have done something worth talking about. I haven't been able to trace him in any way. His clothes were simply rags. Not a thing

THE POINTING FINGER

was any use as a clue. But for all that, my lady, the moment I clapped eyes on him I knew him to be your lost cousin."

The nurse glanced curiously from one to the other. All this was a mystery to her.

Lady Sue drew away from the bed. "How long may it be before his memory returns?" she asked.

"That I could not say, madam," answered the nurse. "Perhaps the doctor could tell you. He will be here in a few moments. He seems to think it very improbable that the patient will ever recover his memory. He has had some great shock, and the brain has lost its power of recalling what happened before that shock."

Lady Sue looked helplessly at O'Shea. "In that case we are no better off than before."

"We are not," he agreed. "That's one reason why I sent for your ladyship. The affair is beyond me altogether. Only I'm ready to swear that's the right man if you need me to do it."

She looked long and thoughtfully at the

THE POINTING FINGER

wasted, altered face, the transparent hands. On the right hand stood out the scar of which O'Shea had spoken. All doubt as to the Irishman's truth and honesty had vanished before her own instinctive recognition. Fate had played a trump card into the man's very hand. He might well feel triumphant. However extraordinary that likeness, she could not hesitate a moment in deciding whose was the right to the title and estates. But all the same, the task of denouncing an impostor was not a pleasant one.

"I will see the doctor," she said suddenly.
"I—I must speak to him alone."

CHAPTER XXII

MRS. EBURY had waited nearly an hour in that dreary room before Lady Sue appeared. One look at the girl's face revealed fresh troubles and fresh perplexities.

As they drove back to Pont Street she heard something of what had happened, of Lady Sue's positive belief in the personality of the sick man, of her long and guarded interview with the doctor. "He gives but one hope," she said. "And that a very problematical one. There's just a chance that some other shock as sudden, as strange, or even as terrible as the first, may restore the balance of the brain, and awaken memory of the past. He advises me to take him home, to get him back to familiar surroundings. Once there he may have some chance of recovery. But think of my difficulty, Editha! Think of mother; of

THE POINTING FINGER

the necessary explanations, of—of the other man ! ”

“ You place him last,” said Mrs. Ebury. “ But I suppose that is not to say he is unimportant. I foresee a considerable amount of difficulty. What if he refuses to—quit ? ”

Lady Sue’s delicate face flamed redly. “ He—oh ! he could not ! ”

“ I don’t know,” said Mrs. Ebury dryly. “ You have not yet discovered the motive that sent him to play this double part. It must have been a very strong one. Why should he acknowledge himself liar and traitor unless compelled ? And who is to compel him if the real Ronald is incapable of asserting his rights, or worse still, of remembering he has any rights to assert ? ”

“ Oh ! I have thought of that until I am nearly distracted. And bad and black as the case looks I cannot help thinking he may—he will be able to clear himself ! ”

“ I have heard of a faith that removes mountains,” said Editha dryly. “ Yours, my dear Sue, would seem to rival its capacity ! I made a careful study of the—well, let us call him the claimant, and if ever anyone

THE POINTING FINGER

was satisfied with his position and living in blessed assurance of its perfect security, it is the gentleman now in possession ! ”

Lady Sue said nothing. The significance of that remark went home with cruel meaning. She, too, had thought how well the part was played. How sure the player was of success.

Later on that night, when her friend came into her room for a “ten minutes’ ” chat, she displayed a singular reserve.

“We have two weeks’ grace. He cannot be removed till then. It is quite impossible for me to make any plans at present.”

That was all she said, and Mrs. Ebury was conscious of a sort of defiance in the manner of her saying it. She had too much tact to press the subject farther. Besides, she recognised that the girl’s mind was a chaos of doubt and irresolution. She had faced a severe ordeal, and it only meant preparation for another to the full as severe and infinitely more difficult. In this trying moment all her sympathies were with her, but she was clear-sighted enough to foresee danger ahead. If Lady Sue really cared

THE POINTING FINGER

for this man, what would it mean in the future? Did she recognise that the cleverness of the trick in no way condoned the dishonour of the trickster? That when the flaming sword of justice banned his Eden from his gaze, the Eve who had ministered to its enchantment must also be left behind? Could anything be said or done that would alter that situation? Could anything in reason or out of it make wrong into right, or set the wrong-doer as claimant for pity, not for condemnation?

She kissed the poor bewildered girl very tenderly indeed. She bade her try to rest and not think. But when she closed the door she knew her advice would not be taken.

"What will be the end of it all?" she asked herself. "It's taking about as much hold of me as of Sue. I almost wish—no, I don't, though! What woman could? Mystery and complication are the breath of life to us. But I would give—well, my new diamond necklace, I think, to be present when Sue confronts the usurper with the news of her discovery!"

THE POINTING FINGER

Lady Sue had seen the door close with a sense of relief. There are times in life when one is sufficient for oneself. When the tenderest sympathy hurts, and the proffer of consolation or the aid of counsel are alike undesirable.

Lady Sue, at the present moment, had to reckon with herself under a new aspect.

She was no longer the brilliant, high-spirited, careless girl to whom the joys and excitement of life made the best appeal for living. She had faced trouble and difficulty. She had seen something of the seamy side of that satin-robed existence which had once been her natural clothing. The shock had sobered and surprised her. But greatest surprise of all was her own discovery of the possibilities within herself. She marvelled where they had been hidden ; why they now showed themselves as factors in this strange drama of complication. A crisis was fast approaching. It could not be evaded. She had refused to face it, but now it had faced her.

She sat in her room with her face hidden in her hands the better to think out this problem. All external things were shut out.

THE POINTING FINGER

There was nothing, no one, but just herself and her thoughts.

Strange pictures passed before her eyes. Pictures of childhood, of girlhood, of youth. She saw herself and Ronnie as playmates, as friends, as the quarelsome, cousinly, informal pair about whom the hopes of Edensore had played; with whom the House of Edensore had now to reckon. Duty faced her sternly and inexorably. The old life, the old gay heedlessness, the old indifference to other people's feelings or desires had gone for ever. She was as fairly honest with herself as it is possible for a woman to be. For there could be no halting between two opinions any longer.

She pictured herself cold, dignified, disdainful, demanding of one man his reasons for subterfuge and flagrant villainy. She pictured herself merciful, compassionate, sisterly, leading another back to reason and to life. Helping the shattered mind to build up its broken fragments into solid truth; ministering to the sad and suffering body whose pitiful history had wrung her heart with grief and horror. All the sympathy of her soul had rushed forth to that helpless broken

THE POINTING FINGER

personality. As she pictured the bright, joyous boy she had last seen and contrasted him with this shattered wreck, it seemed to her nothing would be too great a sacrifice if only he might be restored to love and home and memory. And these things might lie in her power to give back to him in two weeks' time.

Two weeks.

The doctor had spoken hopefully of youth and physique, and powers of recuperation. Once he was removed to the familiar atmosphere of boyhood's days, the familiar sounds and faces and scenes, there was possible hope of mental restoration.

"It will need great patience," the medical man had concluded. "He must have suffered cruelly!"

"Suffered cruelly." Those words haunted the girl unceasingly. She dropped her hands, and saw her own face as she lifted it. Saw it reflected in all its pallor of grief and bewilderment and dawning resolution.

A sudden rush of tears blinded her eyes, blotted out the face. Pity for him merged into pity for herself. So forlorn, so alone

THE POINTING FINGER

she felt at this moment, facing the crucial test of womanhood's powers of forgiveness—or condonation.

At the end of that first probationary week the sick man had turned the corner of convalescence. He grew stronger. He manifested an interest in his surroundings. He ate and drank with extraordinary avidity, and he was amazingly patient and tractable.

As the cropped hair grew, and his hollow cheeks filled out, and his eyes lost their look of terrified expectance, the likeness between himself and the pretended Ronald, Earl of Edensore, grew more and more apparent.

With each daily visit Lady Sue dwelt on the extraordinary resemblance more persistently; fought out its conflicting claims with greater determination. O'Shea had appointed himself faithful and devoted attendant, and the nurse's services were no longer requisitioned. The Irishman's faculty for amusing his patient developed with the gradual improvement in his health. But no effort, however skilful, could bring back

THE POINTING FINGER

the powers of memory. Lady Sue was not unobservant of O'Shea's excellent qualities, his unflinching good humour, his unwearied patience and untiring efforts at diverting or interesting that dulled and shattered brain. All this time she had given no hint to Lady Anne of what had occurred, or what was still to occur.

Again and again had she sat down to write a letter that—as yet—was not written. Again and again had Mrs. Ebury begged her to get the task “off her mind.” Something withheld her. She could not name it except as an instinct, a strange force, acting through reluctance and demanding to be considered. But, as Mrs. Ebury pointed out, consideration threatened to become a lasting obstacle, and Lady Anne's feelings had to be reckoned with—some time.

The “to-morrow” of possibility still hovered over every decision, and finally that to-morrow was so nearly upon the heels of their own actual departure that, as Lady Sue put it, “it must be a case of a telegram, or nothing.”

As a wire could not afford to be explicit

THE POINTING FINGER

there seemed no help for it but to arrive unannounced, or with just the formal notice of necessary rooms.

Mrs. Ebury was unable to travel with the party on this occasion. Her own affairs, social and domestic, interfered with her desires. It was annoying, but also it was inevitable. The last act of the drama would be played without her presence in the auditorium, and the bald consolation of letters alone remained as tribute to the deserved confidence of friendship.

Lady Sue, O'Shea, and the now convalescent invalid travelled down to Wales in a reserved carriage. And Lady Sue spent the hours of that journey in a sublime state of uncertainty as to how she was to explain the presence of the invalid; in a tremor of eagerness to see how the false Ronald would look when confronted with the real one; in alternate chill and fever and hope of expectancy; in imagining every possible and impossible explanation of this masquerade of doubles; in torturing herself one moment, and reassuring herself the next; in fact, doing everything that an imaginative and passionate

THE POINTING FINGER

woman could do to exercise her faculty of imagination.

And yet—had she only known it—how simple was to be the explanation of this torturing puzzle !

CHAPTER XXIII

A CARRIAGE was waiting at the little station.

O'Shea had muffled up his charge so that his face was almost concealed. He gave him his arm, and assisted him into the brougham while Lady Sue was giving directions about their luggage to the attendant footman.

During the long drive to the Abbey they scarcely spoke. The invalid dozed in his corner, wearied by the long journey. Lady Sue had at last accepted neutral passivity as her best adviser. O'Shea was in a tumult of expectancy and wonder. He had received no instructions. He had no conception of Lady Sue's intentions. She had merely asked if he would continue to look after her cousin until his health was more satisfactory, a task too congenial to the

THE POINTING FINGER

Irishman's present inclinations for him to dream of aught but accepting it.

All his interest was centred in the Edensore he had met, and known, and deserted, and found again so strangely. The many pricks of conscience suffered for that desertion were laid at rest by his recent atonement.

He felt he had done his best and would continue to do it; that nothing would ever tempt him into crooked paths of shame and sin; that beauty and suffering had redeemed him, and henceforth his life was at their service. Nothing at once so pitiful or so humiliating as that poor shattered fragment of humanity, wandering blindly through the London streets, had ever come in his way. And do what he might, he could not free himself of self-accusation, could not stand free of blame. Every look of those sad boyish eyes, every haggard line in the changed face were a rebuke to himself. If the devotion of his whole life to the service or comfort of this forlorn manhood could in any way benefit or console it, that devotion he was ready and willing

THE POINTING FINGER

to give. That there would be place and need of it he felt sure, as long as Jasper Mallory was in the land of the living.

His brow darkened as he recalled the plot against this young foolhardy life; the temptation held out to himself which spoke only of "accident" and yet proffered a bribe for death. The boy's own ignorance and trust had saved him many a time. O'Shea was not of the stuff that goes to form cold-blooded assassins. Again and again had he scotched opportunity with the heel of indignation. Again and again had he saved the life he had been tempted to betray into danger. Side by side they had fought, travelled, exploited, endeavoured. Side by side had marched and rested and slept by camp fire and river; in veldt and forest. And now they were side by side once more, and again his was the task to save, and aid, and rescue. He drew a long deep breath. He looked from the drooped head of the slumbering man to the golden one of that good genius of his, found by accident and made *Dea ex Machina* by that perplexing Fate which

THE POINTING FINGER

plays with human lives as a gambler with his stakes.

Lady Sue heard the sigh and looked quickly at him.

"Are you losing hope?" she asked.

"No, my lady. I never felt more hopeful."

"Then why that sigh?"

"Perhaps 'twas for days dead and gone," he said, "stirring times, when one held life in one's hand and played with it as check on the chessboard of danger. When time went to the measure of events, not of hours! When he and I——"

He paused. Her soft bright eyes were on his face, eager, intent.

"The—the—other, he was in Africa too. Are you sure the adventures and dangers were never shared by him—also?"

O'Shea's glance wandered to that scarred hand closed in the quiet helplessness of sleep.

"You mean that both may have come across my way? That I would not have known——"

"Yes," she said. "For remember it was in that land they met; that one told the

THE POINTING FINGER

history of his heritage, and the other took advantage of the knowledge ! ”

“ True for you, my lady,” said O’Shea thoughtfully. “ But I can only say that every feeling of my heart warms to this man, and that the other seemed to me naught but a stranger. Ask yourself how or why it should be ; for if I’m not much mistaken ’twas your own case also ? ”

Lady Sue turned her head aside and looked once more out of the window. It was her turn to sigh now.

As the carriage turned into the drive she glanced anxiously at her cousin. He had wakened suddenly, and was gazing about in his usual absent, indifferent manner.

In the cold spring twilight the leafless trees looked bare and desolate. The sky shone redly above the distant hills, and the grey stone walls of the old Abbey caught some of its radiance. Breathlessly Lady Sue watched that haggard face. But it showed only the usual listless indifference. When the carriage stopped, O’Shea helped the young man out, and together they followed Lady Sue into the great hall. The leaping

THE POINTING FINGER

fire-gleams seemed to greet them with warm welcome. All the familiar, homely things gathered and treasured through generations, stood as friends might stand, each with its history and its memory.

O'Shea felt the hand on his arm suddenly tighten its grasp. He looked eagerly at the white face turning in puzzled wonderment from spot to spot. There came a sudden breathless exclamation, and then a violent fit of trembling shook the slight, frail figure. He made a staggering step or two, and sank into a chair.

Lady Sue was by his side in an instant, forgetful of her mother, who had turned from the fireplace to greet her.

"Ronnie," she whispered eagerly, "you are at home—your own home. Oh ! don't you remember—now ? "

But the look of awakening had vanished. There was only the old vacancy and bewilderment in the uplifted eyes.

O'Shea removed the soft travelling cap from his head and loosened the collar of his overcoat. Then Lady Anne gave a faint scream and rushed forward.

THE POINTING FINGER

"Sue!" she cried. "Who is it? What is it? What has happened to Ronnie?"

There was a quiet triumph in Lady Sue's glance as she met her mother's bewildered eyes.

"So you, too, know him as Ronnie?" she said.

"But, of course—only—what has happened? Surely not another accident? He was quite well when he went out after luncheon!"

Lady Sue drew her gently away.

"Mother," she said, "something very strange has happened. We have been deceived by a curious likeness. This is the real Ronald. My cousin, your nephew. The—the other——"

She paused abruptly. For the library door opened almost on her words. The "other" Ronald stood there.

He stared at the figure in the chair as if he saw one risen from the dead. He came forward a few paces, and the two men faced each other as a figure in a mirror faces its own reflection.

Lady Anne was dumb with amazement, O'Shea with curiosity, Lady Sue with anxiety.

THE POINTING FINGER

For a space of breathless seconds the group remained motionless, speechless. The shock was too abrupt, too startling for any verbal emphasis of its amazing possibilities.

But it was broken in a manner as strange as its own cause and effect.

For the false Edensore seized the hands of the true, and broke into breathless laughter and sudden speech.

"My God! Ronald, boy! Is it you—safe and sound. Oh! thank Heaven, you're home at last!"

The laugh, the words, the action struck on Lady Sue's excited nerves as ice upon hot steel. She gave a little hysterical sob and clutched her mother's arm.

"Can you understand what it all means, for I—I——"

She looked from one man to the other. She saw not embarrassment or confusion as she had expected, but recognition and delight. An eager welcome—an unmasked acknowledgment of truth.

Lady Anne was too amazed to speak. She clung to her daughter in helpless confusion of mind, wondering if she was a

THE POINTING FINGER

prey to some illusion, or the victim of nightmare.

The only passive agent in the whole affair was the person most concerned in it. He gazed at the faces around him with vacant wonder. He heard that voice which was the echo of his own ; he looked back into the eager eyes that welcomed him, but neither voice nor eyes recalled his wandering senses from their burial-ground of pain.

With a sudden sense of horror the man who was speaking paused and looked searchingly at his unmoved listener. Then his hands relaxed their grasp. He turned to O'Shea, to Lady Sue, to the gracious personality that had meant an earl's sister, and his aunt, a few moments before.

"What has happened ? Who has hurt him ? Why is he like this ?" he demanded.

Then Lady Sue summoned courage and spoke.

"He was left for dead amongst savages in a savage land. He has been tortured and ill-treated until memory and wits forsook him. How he escaped, how he found his way back to his own country we cannot

THE POINTING FINGER

discover. Yet, for all that, I know him to be my cousin Ronald ; the rightful head of the family, and the Earl of Edensore."

Her voice rang out clear and defiant. Her eyes seemed to challenge a denial.

There was a moment's dead silence. Then response came. Calm, gentle, utterly unexpected—

"Of course he is Ronald, Earl of Edensore. Who should be more certain than I!"

CHAPTER XXIV

LADY SUE stared. Her face grew deadly white.

"You acknowledge it? *You!* Then why are you in his place? What is the meaning of your presence here all these months?"

She looked at him as if expecting sign of guilt, or confusion.

There was none.

He drew back a step or two from the cowering figure in the great Abbot's chair. He squared his shoulders and threw back his head and smiled gaily, as one who at last throws aside a wearisome burden.

"Lady Susan," he said, "though I stand here and look a fool, and seem to have played a sorry part, believe me I played it for his sake and at his request."

Then Lady Anne seemed to recover wits and breath together. She turned on him

THE POINTING FINGER

amazed and incredulous, but avidly curious for all that.

"But who are *you*?" she demanded.

He looked at her, at Lady Sue, at the poor, witless, passive creature to whom this talk of land and honours and title was as an unintelligible language.

"Do you really wish to know?" he asked, in a low unsteady voice. "Or is it impossible to guess? Lady Anne, have you never thought your brother might have had another son; unnamed, unacknowledged, and yet, with right and title to prove himself what he has played at being?"

Lady Anne gave a faint cry. "No—no! It's not true! Not possible!"

He looked calmly at her excited face; at Lady Sue's, down-bent, rose-flushed, quivering with eager longing.

"It is only true, and only possible if the honour of the family demands it," he said simply. "I press no undesired claim. But it was given to me to save my brother's life; to learn my own history. To come here as a stranger who yet was no stranger. Have I said enough? For I only held my

THE POINTING FINGER

place in trust for Ronald, and now to Ronald I yield it again ! ”

As his voice uttered the name and rang out with triumph and relief a curious change came over the listless face of that other Ronald.

It seemed as if the sleeping senses suddenly answered to a call. Wonder and terror were born anew, and with them something else ; something that fought its way in the birth struggle for existence, and sprang to life exultant, yet fearful of its powers.

The feeble figure rose, and staggered forward in a blind, reckless fashion. It pushed aside outstretched arms that would have stayed it. It moved as a sleep-walker moves, impelled by a persistent idea and forced to follow its guidance.

Awestruck and wondering, the little group watched, and then as if by one common impulse followed.

Straight to the library those stumbling footsteps blundered, and entering made neither pause nor wait till the dizzy brain called “ halt.”

Ronald, Lord Edensore, stood before

THE POINTING FINGER

the mysterious picture, whose influence had shadowed and cursed his house for generations past. He stood and gazed at the evil face, the haunting eyes, the uplifted hand. And as he gazed the sunlight of reason burst like a flood over the long-clouded brain. The iron bands relaxed ; memories of childhood and youth thronged back in countless numbers. Like a child he fell on his knees crying and sobbing in delirious joy. Like a child he prattled of home and love and foolish fond imaginings. Like a child, too, he turned at sound of his brother's voice, and fell into his brother's arms, and rested there passive—silent—still.

"The doctor was right," sobbed Lady Sue. "The shock has restored his senses."

But O'Shea hastened swiftly to where that frail figure lay, half supported against the strong shoulder, half embraced by the protecting arms of unacknowledged brotherhood. He looked at the ashen colourless face, the livid lips. He gently freed that supporting arm, and bore its helpless burden to the couch over which the fatal hand stretched out its fateful finger, pointing

THE POINTING FINGER

relentlessly as the doom it foretold. Pointing to somewhere ; to something.

Something that never mortal eyes might see, nor of which mortal lips might speak until they had passed the barrier Ronald of Edensore had passed that night.

CHAPTER XXV

THE two Edensores, the dead and the living, were alone with each other in that great chamber where hope had known birth, and despair had faced death for generations past.

On the bed where the old earl had lain and where the son he had wronged had stood beside him, lay now his best beloved, yet not his heir. Fate has strange methods of revenge, and Fate had chosen to right a long past wrong by one of those accidents of justice which have gone far to build up a faith in Divine jurisdiction.

The woman whose story Lady Sue had told to her friend in that moment of confidence had been the legally though secretly wedded wife of her uncle. A bitter quarrel had separated them, and the report of her death came to him as a relief from burdensome obligation. She had died at Cape Town of

THE POINTING FINGER

fever, and he, with some difficulty, verified that death. But he never knew that she had left a son, on whom she had bestowed the legacy of her own cherished hatred. The boy had never known his father's name. Letters, and marriage and birth certificates which would have won for him an English title and heritage, had been placed by his mother in the care of an old African woman, who had been the child's nurse. With some queer superstition as to the ill-luck of the sealed packet the old woman put it in a tin box and buried it in the garden of her mistress's house. Then she and the child wandered over the greater part of South Africa, staying a few months in civilised towns, or working occasionally on a Boer farm.

The boy picked up a desultory sort of education, but became an expert in all matters appertaining to sport, hunting, exploration, adventure. He knew most of the Zulu tribes and their dialects. He was bold and fearless. Sometimes he played guide to the English sportsmen who craved "big game." They paid him well for his services,

THE POINTING FINGER

and with the money he bought books, and studied, learning much about his native land yet never feeling any curiosity to visit it.

While pursuing one of his quests he suddenly came upon a solitary traveller who had lost both track and guide. He broke in unexpectedly upon his primitive camp, and broke in as unexpectedly upon that extraordinary facsimile of himself which had led by strange and devious ways to the present crisis.

Alone in those vast solitudes, face to face with unknown dangers, knit in close comradeship by ever recurring need and sympathy, the two young men grew deeply attached and deeply interested. It was the supposed legitimate Lord Rollestone who first threw light upon the extraordinary resemblance between his unknown brother and himself. Some hint of that old story had come to him, and found its sequel in the history of the dead woman at Cape Town. He seized upon the mystery and translated its last proofs.

The truth was not altogether palatable

THE POINTING FINGER

to the new heir. He had grown accustomed to a roving life ; to freedom, to action. The life of cities had never attracted him. To live idly and at ease possessed no such joys as the free breath of the veldt, the great solitudes of nature ; the alternate danger and comradeship of the hunter's existence. Yet his brother insisted on an assertion of rights, and in the end he travelled back to Cape Town, leaving Ronald in camp. The old African woman still lived. She confessed to his mother's legacy and described where she had hidden it. Meanwhile the young adventurer had found telegrams and letters awaiting his brother, and thus learnt of their father's illness. He knew it would be impossible for Ronald to reach England in time. But there was no reason why he should not go in his place. Why he should not make himself known to the father, who either wilfully or ignorantly had so long ignored his existence. He wrote explaining all this, and hired a Kaffir messenger to take the packet to Ronald's camp. Then he sailed for England.

It was with considerable trepidation he

THE POINTING FINGER

faced the ordeal of identity, but to his surprise everyone took him for the other Ronald without any hesitation or inquiry. It seemed the easiest thing imaginable to slip into his brother's place, to accept his rights without proof or question of a claim unguessed by others. Two main difficulties confronted him, and had caused considerable perturbation of mind. The one was his meeting and association with Lady Sue. The other the recognition of Jasper Mallory. Yet even here he had scored and come off victor.

So well had Lady Sue played her part that he had never dreamt she had questioned his identity. So sullen and persevering had been Jasper Mallory's enmity that that fact alone proved his acceptance of the situation. The Earl was completely ignorant of the dastardly attempt on his younger brother's life. But he was not ignorant of the increasing peril of his own. Well enough he knew that no poacher's shot had struck him down in the home woods. Often he had noted the sullen resentment, the bitter hatred in Mallory's eyes, when

THE POINTING FINGER

by some act or word he asserted his authority as lord of the manor and Lord of Edensore. If without harm to himself his cousin could have killed him, then assuredly he would have been a dead man ere ever that command to the Front had been received by the gallant captain. But here again Fate had thwarted his desires. As the young Earl reviewed all these events and happenings, he was lost in wonder, and no less in gratitude.

But all the same he remembered with a sort of shock how lightly this plot had been constructed. How he had wrung from his newly discovered brother a promise to release him from this position if, at any time, he wearied of the risk and the responsibility. It had looked easy and possible enough.

A meeting, the readjustment of identities, another exchange, and then to each his old place and position in life.

Now he recognised that life is not a mere passive thing in the hands of human will. It is stern, relentless, inexorable. What had looked at first sight a good jest

THE POINTING FINGER

to be merrily played for a good purpose, had turned to grave and serious tragedy—a tragedy affecting many lives: a tragedy his own heart faced with fear and misgiving. For he asked himself how would Sue take it? What would she say? He had taken only his lawful place, but what of the part he had played in deceiving her? How persuade her that neither to his brother nor himself had any thought of wrong, or harm, or misjudgment occurred?

The masquerade was over. What of the players?

One stood there alone, the rightful Lord of Edensore. Alone in that death chamber of his race, looking with dimmed eyes at the still figure and marble face of his dead brother. When last he had looked on it, it had been bronzed, healthy, boyish, reckless. When the great jest had been determined on, how good and excellent a thing it had seemed!

But alas! What of the jest now—or the jester?

The play was over. The curtain had been rung down. What remained?

THE POINTING FINGER

"If I had known, if I could have foreseen this, I would never have left him!" he cried aloud in a sudden agony of remorse and grief, and as his voice echoed through the dim vast chamber the door opened, and Lady Sue entered.

She paused as she saw him. He noticed that she wore a soft black gown, that she held in her hand some sprays of flowers. He did not address her, and presently she moved forward and came to the side of the quiet sleeper. Then she placed the snowy flowers around and about him.

It was a strange tableau. They stood, one on each side of the dead boy they both had loved as brother and sister love. And with all the past mystery and sorrow to explain, only looked with sadly questioning eyes at each other's face.

She spoke at last. The tension was unbearable.

"Will you tell me why you did it?" she asked faintly. "Here—by his side, you will at least speak truth."

The colour flew to his face.

"Have you any reason to accuse me

THE POINTING FINGER

of speaking anything else ? ” he said. “ There is a great deal to explain, but the part I have played I at least had a right to play.”

“ A right ? ” she repeated.

“ Assuredly. We agreed to change places. He said no one would ever guess. And he knew that my birthright gave me a claim exceeding his own.”

“ Your—birthright ? ” she faltered.

“ My mother was also Countess of Edensore,” he said. “ I have the proofs. She and my father separated within a year of the secret marriage. My father never knew of my birth. It was a cruel wrong to him and to me, but what use to reproach the dead ? I am the senior of Ronnie by four years. I, too, was named Ronald by my mother. When Fate arranged that meeting in Africa, our birthright spoke as nature speaks. The likeness between us was too remarkable to pass as accident. I had known nothing of who I really was till Ronald told me. Then I lost no time in securing the necessary proofs. The desire to see England, to learn something of my race and home, first led to the idea of exchanging identities.

THE POINTING FINGER

He wished to remain in Africa. He suggested I should go to England in his place. Then came the news of our father's illness. I could not easily communicate with him. I acted on the impulse of the moment. I sailed at once for home—his home. I was accepted in his place, and—I remained."

"Leaving him in danger, at the mercy of those savages who——"

Her voice broke. She hid her face; it seemed as if that other quiet face upon the pillows held reproach and suffering unutterable.

"Sue," said Lord Edensore in a harsh, dry voice, "I give you my word of honour that he was safe enough when I left him. Neither had he any intention of penetrating into the interior of the country. I grew uneasy as month followed month, and my letters were unanswered. But I remained here for two strong and sufficient reasons. I had to reckon with Jasper Mallory. I had learnt to love—you!"

Her hands fell. She lifted her white face, white no longer, and met the truth in his deep and sorrowful eyes.

With difficulty he spoke on—

THE POINTING FINGER

"It was a false position. Oh, I know it now! How black, how dishonourable it looks! But the thing remains. I lost myself in dreams of mad happiness. I fenced with danger, with suspicion, with the murderous hate of that paltry coward, with the possibilities of discovery. I had never faced such a temptation. And in my heart of hearts I knew I was not the impostor you might have called me, might have thought me, if——"

"I did not call you that!" she said suddenly. "You played your own part, not Ronald's, when I came upon the scene. It needs something more than physical resemblance to deceive a woman."

"I did not mean to deceive—you," he said simply. "At any time I was ready to confess the truth had you asked it."

In a long pause of silence their eyes met. Each looked into the other's heart, and seemed to ask and yield forgiveness.

The mystery, the complications, the wrong of past years, the strange methods of restitution, the confession of their own awakened interest, the deep passion of the man, the

THE POINTING FINGER

half reluctant joy of the woman, all spoke in that long gaze.

Love sprang recklessly to meet love across even the barrier of Death. For with love, life comes to its own fulfilment, and in its hour of joy all else is forgotten.

He crossed to her side. "I am very humble," he said. "I have made my confession. There is no question now of wrong or right or—restitution. Only of forgiveness. I leave my case in your hands. I think—he—would be glad that I should face no harsher judge."

There were tears in her eyes. But no harsh thought of him within her heart. Only a great thankfulness.

"It seems to me I have nothing to forgive," she said faintly. "You only took what you had the right to take. Of course it is difficult to explain, to understand—but there is no stain on your honour."

"No, thank Heaven!" he said fervently. "And yet I would have foregone all rights and never sought to prove a claim of mine had Ronnie so desired, or if you——"

"I?"

THE POINTING FINGER

"Or if you had loved—him."

"He was only the dearest and truest of brothers," she said.

"And—I?"

"You—Ronald?" She lifted her head and smiled amidst her tears. "Ah, I can't say. I can't tell; not now. Not here!"

And in saying that she said all he had craved to know.

CHAPTER XXVI

MRS. EBURY sat in her pretty boudoir in Pont Street and read with wondering eyes a long, incoherent, and wholly extraordinary letter from her friend.

It burst into alternate raptures and explanations. First was described that tragic home-coming. The effect upon the half-demented boy of the first shock of recognition. Her own amazement at Edensore's frank acknowledgment of the truth.

"I shall never forget that first look of awakening memory in Ronnie's eyes. The way he rushed into that room and gazed at the Monk's picture. The cry that escaped him as he saw that fiendish face! (Oh! Editha, I hate it more than ever now.) It seemed to bring back everything to his mind. Oh! poor, poor boy! Well, we shall never know what he endured in that terrible

THE POINTING FINGER

land—how he escaped, or found his way home to England. The shock of mental memory proved more than that feeble body could bear. He died in Ronald's arms. Ronald, the rightful, the elder born. For the mystery is explained now, Editha. You remember our long talks, our theories, our wonder? Well—one theory is proved at all events. That little episode in Uncle Geoff's life turned out to be a legal marriage, though a secret one, and the unknown Countess of Edensore had a son. This seems such an easy and natural explanation now, but oh dear me, Editha, what heartburnings and misery it caused me! Yet you see a woman's instinct stands for something. Marvellous as was the likeness, easily as the elder Ronald stepped into the place of the younger, I was never quite convinced of his right to do so. Only—the blessed relief to know he was in his right place after all! He *was* the heir, he *is* now the Earl of Edensore, though sorely to the perplexity and misgivings of the legal firm of the house. Poor Mr. Bryantson will never get over it, I'm afraid. I can't tell you what a sad time it has been, and yet (but long before this you will have guessed it) for me—not wholly sad. For he loves me, and has confessed

THE POINTING FINGER

that for my sake he stayed on, not having courage to leave, and fearful of Jasper Mallory's evil machinations. Can't you imagine what our dear cousin will feel and say (no swear) when he hears what has happened? Fortunately Ronald had all the necessary proofs with him, so the matter of identification was soon cleared up. Besides, there was an acknowledgment from the dead Ronnie, and Uncle Geoff's marriage has been proved. Still, you may imagine the amazement and wonder and conjecture on all sides. As for poor mother, she is bewildered to the verge of lunacy. But oh! dear Editha, I am so happy. It's impossible to write simply or coherently. Goodness knows if you'll be able to understand what I've said; if you can't, just make up your mind to run down here and learn it all in an official and proper manner.—Ever your own

“SUE.

“P.S.—Of course it's too early to fix a date for a future event, but it is not improbable that June will see your erratic friend transformed into the Countess of Edensore.”

Mrs. Ebury laid down the last sheet and laughed softly. But her bright eyes looked less bright than their wont.

THE POINTING FINGER

"Dear Sue! I'm so glad," she said half aloud. "And I think I will go down to the Abbey by and by—just to see how she conforms herself to these novel conditions."

It was a month later before Mrs. Ebury found herself free to carry out that intention. As she seated herself in the carriage and watched the busy breathless crowd at the station, her eyes caught the significant notice-boards to which most men's and women's eyes turned with dread or horror or expectance.

"Latest telegrams from the seat of war."

She called a boy and bought two or three papers from him congratulating herself, as she had always done of late, that no one nearer than chance friends had power to twist and torture her nerves and heart-strings with each recurring bulletin of news.

Not till the train was off and speeding through the most hideous part of advertisement-boarded country, did she open one of the papers to glance at the news and

THE POINTING FINGER

the latest list of the victims. As her eyes ran over the printed lines she felt herself start. A name stood out among a pitiable crowd of names and a holocaust of fresh disasters. The name was Mallory. And following it a brief notice: "*Shot in the back.*"

The brief bald words seemed horrible; branding as they did a coward's life with one last humiliating act of cowardice. She read them again. She looked through other papers. The news was confirmed. The name in itself was too uncommon for error, and the regiment was also mentioned.

Editha wondered if the news had reached the Abbey. She thought it hardly possible, unless some brother-officer had wired. It would be odd if she were destined to convey the intelligence, and yet, somehow, she felt that she would prove no unwelcome messenger.

When the long weary journey ended at last, she found Lady Sue waiting on the platform. She looked radiant even in her sombre black.

"I came alone," she said, after first

THE POINTING FINGER

greetings had been exchanged. "Ronnie wanted to come with me, but I thought I'd rather see you by yourself first. Oh! Editha, isn't it all wonderful? Did you ever hear of such a case?"

"Never," said Mrs. Ebury emphatically, and let her friend talk on and on with scarce a break, and had no heart to tell of disaster in that first hour of meeting.

They reached the Abbey, but the young Earl did not appear to welcome them. The butler came forward with a grave perturbed face, and addressed Lady Sue.

"His lordship is in the library, my lady. He desired me to say that——"

"Something has happened? Oh! what is it?" cried Lady Sue breathlessly, as her hand clutched Editha's arm.

"Pray don't be alarmed, my lady. A trifling accident——"

But white as death she flashed past him and into the library. Editha followed.

The young Earl was lying back in a chair. Lady Anne stood beside him, bathing his forehead. Richards, pale and alarmed, stood by, supporting his master's head. At his

THE POINTING FINGER

feet—the frame shattered to splinters—lay the Monk's portrait. The evil face still leered from the canvas; the fatal hand was still outstretched.

With a terrified cry, Lady Sue rushed forward. "Oh! mother, what is it? What has happened?"

"The picture fell down suddenly as Ronnie was sitting writing at that table," explained Lady Anne. "A corner of the frame struck his forehead. We all heard the crash and ran in. He was lying on the ground senseless, but he's coming round now. Don't be frightened, child. He was only stunned. See, his colour is coming back. You're better, Ronnie, are you not? There, don't stir. Sue, if you want to be of any use, you can go on bathing his wound. It doesn't bleed so much as at first."

Lady Sue gave the detested picture a ferocious kick out of the way.

"It's the last time," she said to herself, "that your evil hand shall find place in this room!"

Half an hour later, alarm and explanations

THE POINTING FINGER

were exhausted, and the young Earl proved to have no worse injury than a cut on the temple and a large bruise. He lay on the couch in the library with his head bound up, but otherwise seemed none the worse for his accident.

Then it was, as they sat round the fire, and while Lady Anne dispensed the long delayed tea, that Mrs. Ebury suddenly bethought herself of her news. The London papers still lay on the table where she had thrown them. The fallen picture had been placed in a corner by Richards; its face to the wall.

As Editha read out the ominous paragraph, a sharp exclamation burst from Lady Sue's white lips.

"The picture fell, and Jasper is dead. Ronnie, doesn't it look as if an omen had been fulfilled?"

The young Earl's face grew strangely thoughtful. He remembered Mallory's terror, Mallory's declaration that the Monk's ghostly finger had pointed its warning at him.

Since that moment he had experienced misfortune, danger, now death. Mystery

THE POINTING FINGER

and mysticism were new to the present Lord of Edensore. He had been inclined to scoff at the legend of the picture. But now that legend seemed alive with meaning and portent. Jasper's terror and Jasper's premonition had not been without reason, or without result. And all said and done, it was singular that the fall of the picture should have been coincident with the message of Mallory's death.

"Let me see the paper," he said to Mrs. Ebury. She handed it to him. He read the brief lines carefully. No battle, no action was mentioned. Only that significant phrase, "Shot in the back." It summed up a great deal in four short words. It branded the dead man's ended career with a stigma of eternal shame.

Edensore threw the paper aside and met Lady Sue's eyes. Involuntarily both of them glanced at the vacant space on the wall, and then at the fatal portrait.

"It must never hang there again! Say—it shall not, Ronnie!" exclaimed his cousin eagerly. "Of its own accord it has fallen, let us take it as a signal for future banish-

THE POINTING FINGER

ment. I have always hated the odious thing! Now——”

She turned abruptly as the door opened and O'Shea entered.

“I—I beg pardon, your ladyship. I heard of his lordship's accident a moment ago, and came to ask if I could be of any service.”

“Yes, you can,” exclaimed Lady Sue, springing to her feet and crossing over to where the picture stood against the wall. “Take that thing away—to the turret. The Monk's room, you know. Lock the door, and bring me the key.”

The bewildered Irishman looked from her to the Earl, and then again at the picture. A long trail of rusty wire hung from it. The shattered frame was eloquent of accident. He bent down and lifted the heavy canvas. In doing so he half turned the portrait towards the room. A strange exclamation burst from the astonished lips of Lord Edensore.

“My God! Sue!” he cried. “Look—what does it mean? The Finger's not there!”

THE POINTING FINGER

Lady Sue drew back a step. Her eyes went to the outstretched hand. There was a deep gash in the canvas. The fatal Finger was no longer visible.

O'Shea hurriedly placed the ominous portrait on the nearest chair. He was not exempt from the superstitions of his country. He had heard the story of the Monk's picture during his sojourn at the Abbey.

Dead silence reigned for a moment. The eyes of the little group were fixed upon the evil face and menacing eyes so hatefully familiar.

Then Lady Sue moved back to her cousin's side.

"Ronnie," she whispered, "I am *sure*, I am quite sure it means that the curse is broken. There is no more need to threaten or to warn. Don't you remember that old verse of which I told you—

'Seventh, eighth, and one before,
Cursed be race of Edensore;
Ninth and tenth, and never more
Falls the curse on Edensore.'"

He raised himself on his elbow and gazed

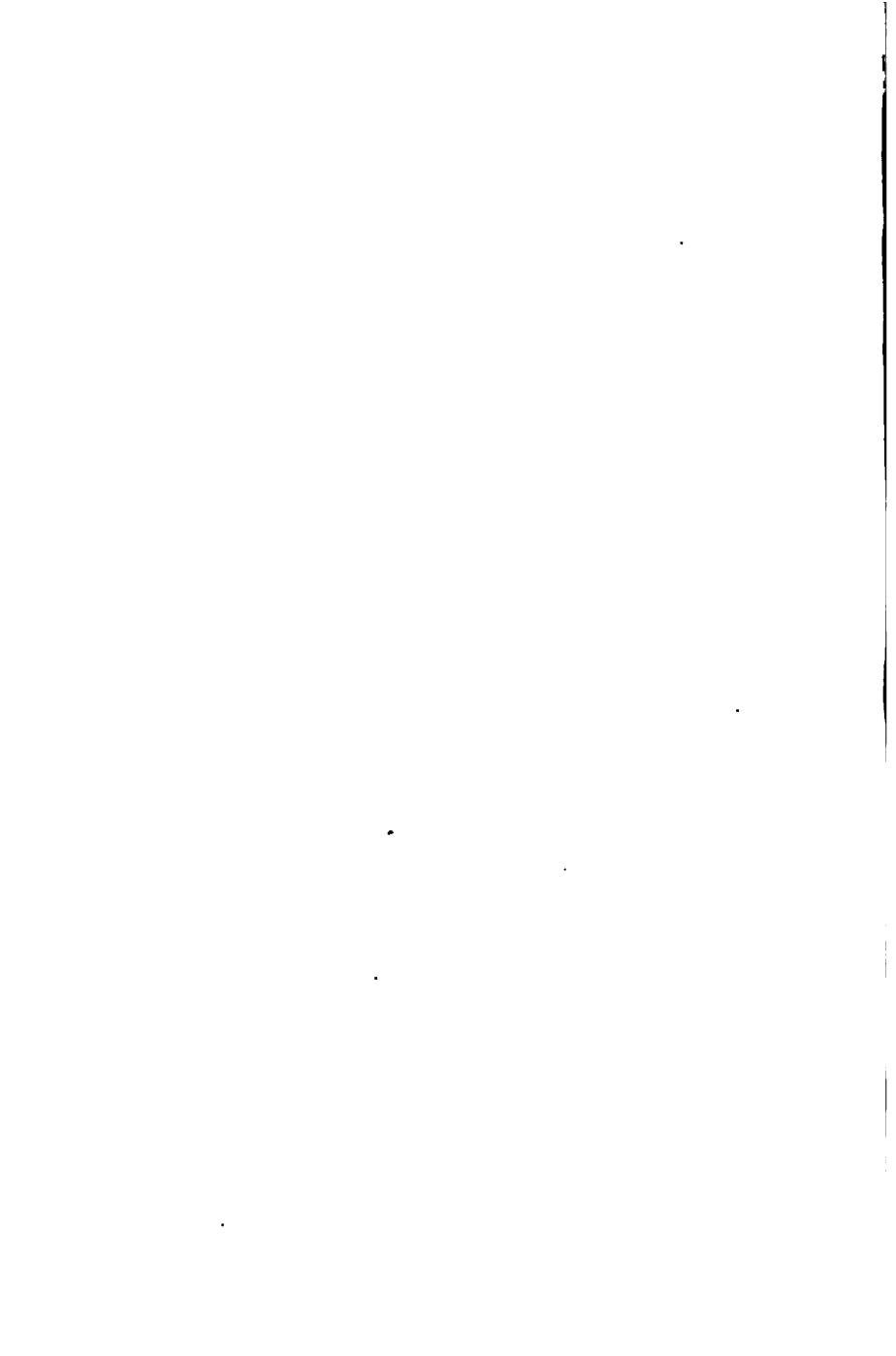
THE POINTING FINGER

searchingly at the ominous face. Then he drew a long, deep breath.

"I am the ninth earl!" he said. "A new race begins. *Our* race, Sue. Ours!"

THE END.

Printed by MORRISON & GIBB LIMITED, Edinburgh



A CATALOGUE OF
BOOKS PUBLISHED
BY EVELEIGH NASH
LONDON, AT 32 BED-
FORD STREET, W.C.



JANUARY 1907

The following Books are now in the Press, and will be published almost immediately:—

GENERAL LITERATURE

Madame de Staël and Her Lovers	Francis Gribble	15s. od. net.
The Last Days of Mary Stuart	Samuel Cowan	12s. 6d. „
Personal Opinions Publicly Expressed	“Rita”	3s. 6d. „
The Making of a Merchant	H. N. Higinbotham	2s. 6d. „
Three Generations of Fascinating Women	Lady Russell	12s. 6d. „
The Queen's Favourite, Robert, Earl of Essex	Martin Hume	12s. 6d. ord.
A Drama of Two Queens (Queen Elizabeth and Mary Queen of Scots)	Arthur D. Innes	7s. 6d. net.

FICTION

The Pointing Finger	“Rita”	6s.
Painted Rock	Morley Roberts	6s.
The Remnant	Charles Marriott	6s.
The Count's Chauffeur	William Le Queux	6s.
Which Woman?	G. B. Burgin	6s.
Maynard's Wives	Herbert Flowerdew	6s.
Her Highness's Secretary	Carlton Dawe	6s.
Petronel of Paradise	Mrs. Fred Maturin	6s.
Kate Bannister	Keighley Snowden	6s.
The Millbank Case	G. Eldridge	6s.
Parson Croft	Norman Innes	6s.

SIXPENNY NOVELS

[In Preparation.]

The Invasion of 1910	William Le Queux.
Raffles	E. W. Hornung.
He Loved but One	Frankfort Moore.
The House in Spring Gardens	Major Arthur Griffiths.
The Green Diamond	Arthur Morrison.
The Triumph of Mrs. St. George	Percy White.
A Drama in Sunshine	H. A. Vachell.
The Blue Peter	Morley Roberts.

EVELEIGH NASH.

NEW AND FORTHCOMING BOOKS.

GENERAL LITERATURE.

FAMOUS BEAUTIES OF TWO REIGNS.

Being an Account of some Fair Women of Stuart and Georgian Times. By MARY CRAVEN. With a Chapter on Fashion in Femininity by MARTIN HUME. Illustrated with Twenty-One Photogravure Portraits. Royal 8vo, 21s. net.

Portraits reproduced are from paintings in the possession of the Duke of Fife, the Duke of Devonshire, the Duke of Richmond and Gordon, Earl Spencer, Lord Hillingdon, Lord Rothschild, and Sir Edmund Antrobus.

THE CHÂTEAUX OF TOURAINE.

By M. H. LANSDALE. Illustrated in colour by JULES GUÉRIN. Royal 8vo, 24s. net.

A reading of "The Châteaux of Touraine" means an intimate knowledge of the people who dwelt within these splendid castles as well as of the buildings themselves. It is a book of vivid interest, in which the reader is made to live again through the stirring events, the joys and the sorrows of the dead and gone kings and queens identified with the early days of these twelve Touraine châteaux.

A TWICE CROWNED QUEEN.

Anne of Brittany. By CONSTANCE, COUNTESS DE LA WARR. With Portraits. Demy 8vo, 7s. 6d. net.

EVELEIGH NASH.

**FROM FIJI TO THE CANNIBAL
ISLANDS.**

By BEATRICE GRIMSHAW. With 100 Illustrations. Demy 8vo,
12s. 6d. net. [In Preparation.]

THE TWO RACES IN CANADA.

By ANDRÉ SIEGFRIED. Demy 8vo, 7s. 6d. [In Preparation.]

A ROYAL TRAGEDY.

Being the True Story of the Assassination of King Alexander and
Queen Draga. By CHEDOMILLE MIJATOVITCH, Late Envoy Extra-
ordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of the King of Servia to the
Court of St. James. Demy 8vo, 7s. 6d. [In Preparation.]

**NOOKS AND CORNERS OF OLD
ENGLAND.**

By ALLAN FEA. Demy 8vo, 10s. 6d. [In Preparation.]

SUCCESS IN LIFE.

By Dr. EMIL REICH. Crown 8vo, 6s. [In Preparation.]

***A Cheap Edition of Two Famous Books
by Martin Hume.***

Author of "The Wives of Henry VIII."

In Red Cloth gilt, large crown 8vo, with Frontispiece Portraits.
Price 3s. 6d.

**THE COURTSHIPS OF QUEEN ELIZA-
BETH.**

**THE LOVE AFFAIRS OF MARY
QUEEN OF SCOTS.**

EVELEIGH NASH.

FICTION.

SIX SHILLING NOVELS.

THE MATRIMONIAL LOTTERY.

By CHARLOTTE O'CONOR ECCLES, Author of "The Rejuvenation of Miss Semaphore." Crown 8vo.

WOMEN AND THE WEST.

By CHARLES MARRIOTT, Author of "Mrs. Alemere's Elopement," etc. Crown 8vo.

A DRAMA IN SUNSHINE.

By HORACE A. VACHELL, Author of "The Procession of Life," "The Hill," etc. New Edition. Crown 8vo.

THE RED BURGEE.

Sea Comedies. By MORLEY ROBERTS, Author of "The Promotion of the Admiral," "The Blue Peter," etc. Crown 8vo.

THE SURGE OF WAR.

Being Memories of an Aide-de-Camp to Frederick the Great. By NORMAN INNES. Crown 8vo.

LAWFUL ISSUE.

By JAMES BLYTH, Author of "Deborah's Life." Crown 8vo.

THE MANAGER'S BOX.

By JOHN RANDAL, Author of "The Sweetest Solace," "Pacifico," etc. Crown 8vo.

EVELEIGH NASH.

THE POWER OF THE PAST.

By DANIEL LESUEUR. Crown 8vo.

GOD'S OUTPOST.

By CULLEN GOULDSBURY. Crown 8vo.

[In Preparation.]

MR. POSKITT.

By J. S. FLETCHER, Author of "The Threshing Floor." Crown 8vo.

[In Preparation.]

EVELEIGH NASH.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS.

GENERAL LITERATURE.

THE NEW RUSSIA.

By LIONEL DECLÉ. Demy 8vo, 7s. 6d.

"A trained journalist, he dived into the heart of the situation, interviewed everybody from Count Witte downwards, and in this entertaining and useful volume he has served up his impressions hot and hot for the British reader."—*Review of Reviews*.

THE GREAT LORD BURGHLEY (WILLIAM CECIL).

By MARTIN HUME, Author of "The Wives of Henry VIII.," etc.
Photogravure Portrait. Demy 8vo, 12s. 6d.

"For the details of this story and of all the complicated affairs of Elizabeth's reign, our readers should go to Mr. Hume's volume. A more careful and judicious account of great events has never been given to the world."—*Westminster Gazette*.

TEN TUDOR STATESMEN.

By ARTHUR D. INNES, Author of "England under the Tudors."
Portraits. Demy 8vo, 15s. net.

"Historical studies of remarkable interest."—*Morning Post*.

"The author is a master of his subject, and possesses a vivid but scholarly style."—*Globe*.

VERSAILLES AND THE COURT UNDER LOUIS XIV.

By JAMES E. FARMER. With Seventy Illustrations. Second Impression. Demy 8vo, 15s. net.

"A volume that is at once informing and anecdotal."—*Daily Telegraph*.

"The book is quick with human interest and rich in historical charm."—*Standard*.

EVELEIGH NASH.

WITH THE EMPRESS DOWAGER OF CHINA.

By KATHARINE A. CARL. Illustrated. Fifth Impression. Demy 8vo, 10s. 6d. net.

"Miss Katharine Carl, who has enjoyed the almost unique experience, for a European, of staying for several months in the Palace of the Empress Dowager of China as her guest and confidential friend, has written a book about that formidable and rather mysterious potentate and her Court which cannot fail to be of extreme interest."—*World*.

"Miss Carl, as has been said, was a very fortunate young lady. Her account of things and persons seen is a very clever piece of work, and her pen is as ready as her brush, which has helped to illustrate her work with many interesting sketches of the personages by whom she was surrounded. She has contributed something to our knowledge and much to our entertainment."—*Evening Standard*.

WITH THE COSSACKS.

Being the Story of an Irishman who rode with the Cossacks throughout the Russo-Japanese War. By FRANCIS M'CULLAGH. Illustrated. Demy 8vo, 7s. 6d. net.

"A veritable human document, rich in sidelights on a wonderful and historic struggle."—*Standard*.

"Vivid and stirring."—*Saturday Review*.

Recollections of the Court of William IV. and the early Court of Queen Victoria.

MY MEMORIES.

By the COUNTESS OF MUNSTER. Portraits. Demy 8vo, 12s. 6d.

"To turn over the leaves of this book is like opening the lid of an old china teapot fragrant with pot-pourri made in the days of our grandmothers, the sweet scent of which fills us with dream-memories of old forgotten things. The quaintly stiff etiquette of old English Court life, the glimpses of old-world characters whose oddities belong to the past, the anecdotes of great personages, the very memory of whom is now fast fading away; the reminiscences of exciting incidents in European history which we now read without a tingling of pulse, the description of manners and customs which have disappeared completely in the turmoil of modernity, are flavoured with that old-fashioned charm which we find in Fanny Burney's 'Evelina' or Mrs. Gaskell's 'Cranford.'"—*Daily Chronicle*.

EVELEIGH NASH.

IN THE DAYS OF THE DANDIES.

By ALEXANDER, LORD LAMINGTON. Introduction by Sir HERBERT MAXWELL, Bart. Portraits. Crown 8vo, 3s. 6d. net.

"Rarely, indeed, does the reader with a taste for personal anecdotes have such a treat as he has in the perusal of this volume. Not a page but has something on it to please, to entertain, to remember."—*Daily Telegraph*.

"We have seldom laid aside a book with more regret than we felt at the last page of this agreeable volume, for good gossip is rare, and this is gossip of the best."—*Times*.

WORKS BY MARTIN HUME.

THE WIVES OF HENRY VIII.

AND THE PARTS THEY PLAYED IN HISTORY. By MARTIN HUME, Author of "The Courtships of Queen Elizabeth," "The Love Affairs of Mary Queen of Scots," etc. With Portraits. Demy 8vo, 18s. net.

"A handsome volume, which will be a permanent possession to any one who is wise enough to purchase it."—*Pall Mall Gazette*.

"The most deeply interesting book Major Hume has written."—*Athenæum*.

THE COURTSHIPS OF QUEEN ELIZABETH.

By MARTIN HUME, Author of "The Love Affairs of Mary Queen of Scots." Revised Edition, with New Chapters on the Personal Relations between Elizabeth and her Favourites. Demy 8vo, 12s. 6d.

"We would counsel a perusal of this very remarkable volume, which, besides being in the highest degree entertaining, furnishes utterly new views of the spacious times of the great Elizabeth."—*Daily Telegraph*.

Uniform with the above Work.

THE LOVE AFFAIRS OF MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS.

By MARTIN HUME. With Portraits. Demy 8vo, 12s. 6d.

"This distinguished historian approaches as near to being severely judicial as any historian is ever likely to be."—*Standard*.

EVELEIGH NASH.

SPANISH INFLUENCE ON ENGLISH LITERATURE.

By MARTIN HUME, Examiner in Spanish in the University of London.
Demy 8vo, 7s. 6d.

"A sound and thoroughly exhaustive study of a fascinating subject."—*Daily Telegraph*.

"A fascinating book."—*Morning Post*.

WORKS ON RUSSIA.

*Important Work on Russian Influence in
the Orient.*

ASIATIC RUSSIA.

By GEORGE FREDERICK WRIGHT, LL.D., F.G.S.A. With Maps
and Illustrations. Two Volumes. Royal 8vo, 32s.

"A book which may with great advantage be consulted on almost every
Russian question."—*Athenaeum*.

"For many years will hold the field as a text-book."—*Daily Chronicle*.

WITH THE RUSSIANS IN PEACE AND WAR.

Recollections of a Military Attaché. By Colonel the Hon. F. A.
WELLESLEY, former British Military Attaché in Russia. With Six
Photogravure Portraits. Demy 8vo, 12s. 6d.

"Should be read by all who wish to understand the tremendous catastrophe
which is developing under our eyes in 1905."—*Daily Telegraph*.

Uniform Works by Carl Joubert.

RUSSIA AS IT REALLY IS.

By CARL JOUBERT. Seventh Impression. Demy 8vo, 7s. 6d.

"Mr. Joubert has lived nine years in the Russian Empire. He has visited
every government of it, and associated with every class. . . . With such an
equipment one expects a book of no uncertain tone. This is precisely what
Mr. Joubert gives us."—*Westminster Gazette*.

EVELEIGH NASH.

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE TSAR AND THE PRESENT STATE OF RUSSIA.

By CARL JOUBERT. Fourth Impression. Demy 8vo, 7s. 6d.

"Full of interesting and even sensational disclosures.—*Daily Telegraph*.

"This book, on the other hand, fascinates because it paints terrible contingencies of the near future."—*Standard*.

THE FALL OF TSARDOM.

By CARL JOUBERT. Demy 8vo, 7s. 6d.

"'The Fall of Tsardom' is a book to be read."—*Spectator*.

AN EYE-WITNESS IN MANCHURIA.

By LORD BROOKE, Reuter's Special Correspondent in Manchuria.
Second Impression. Demy 8vo, 7s. 6d.

"Stands out as a model of what the work of a war correspondent should be."—*Times*.

THE SIEGE AND FALL OF PORT ARTHUR.

By W. RICHMOND SMITH, Special Correspondent with the Japanese
Army besieging Port Arthur. Preface by Lieut.-General Sir W. G.
NICHOLSON, K.C.B. Maps and Illustrations. Demy 8vo, 12s. 6d. net.

"The most important book which the Far Eastern War has yet produced."—*Manchester Guardian*.

THOUGHTS FROM MONTAIGNE.

Selected by CONSTANCE, COUNTESS DE LA WARR. With an Intro-
duction and a Biographical Study. Foreword by EGERTON CASTLE.
Pott 8vo, 2s. 6d. net.

"A very pleasing volume is 'Thoughts from Montaigne.' The editor has performed her difficult task with great skill, and the biographical studies of the great essayist which she contributes are both able and interesting. There could scarcely be a better introduction to the work of that man whom, to quote from Mr. Egerton Castle's 'Foreword' to this book, 'three centuries have pronounced one of the very best companions in the world.'"—*World*.

"The book is beautifully printed, and embellished with a portrait frontispiece and a quaint and characteristic 'Foreword' contributed by Mr. Egerton Castle."—*Lady*.

EVELEIGH NASH.

LIVES OF THE QUEENS OF ENGLAND.

By AGNES STRICKLAND. In Sixteen Volumes. Demy 8vo, Twelve Guineas net the set.

N.B.—A new Edition in Sixteen Volumes, profusely illustrated with collotype, coloured, and hand-coloured Illustrations.

THE PRIVATE LIFE OF TWO EMPERORS.

William II. of Germany and Francis Joseph of Austria. Second Edition. Two Volumes. Ten Illustrations. 24s. net.

"The facts are all clear and authentic."—*Westminster Gazette*.

"These volumes are undeniably well informed."—*Pall Mall Gazette*.

SECRET HISTORY OF THE COURT OF ENGLAND

From the Accession of George III. to the Death of George IV. By LADY ANNE HAMILTON. Two Vols. Illust. Demy 8vo, 30s. net.

THE LIFE OF SIR HENRY VANE THE YOUNGER.

By WILLIAM W. IRELAND. Fully Illust. Demy 8vo, 12s. 6d. net.

"A work of notable interest and worth."—*Scotsman*.

THE LOVE AFFAIRS OF GREAT MUSICIANS.

By RUPERT HUGHES. With numerous Illustrations. Two Volumes. Crown 8vo, 10s. net.

ASPECTS OF BALZAC.

By W. H. HELM, Author of "Studies in Style," etc. Crown 8vo, buckram, 3s. 6d. net.

"The whole aspect of Balzac is treated in Mr. Helm's chapters, and the perusal of them, it is hoped, may induce more readers to turn to that marvellous 'Human Comedy,' which is one of the greatest monuments of literature in the world."—*Graphic*.

EVELEIGH NASH.

THREE BEAUTIFUL GIFT-BOOKS.

in Ornamental Binding.

MILTON'S ENGLAND.

By L. A. MEAD. With Illustrations. 6s. net.

Uniform with "Milton's England."

DICKENS' LONDON.

By FRANCIS MILTOUN. With Illustrations. 6s. net.

Uniform with "Dickens' London."

A WOMAN'S WALKS.

By LADY COLIN CAMPBELL. With Water-Colour Portrait. 6s. net.

THE COMING REACTION.

A Brief Survey and Criticism of the Vices of our Economic System.

By LEGISLATOR. 320 pages. Demy 8vo, 7s. 6d.

"Whoever 'Legislator' may be, there can be no disputing the fact that he has given the world the most trenchant and original criticism yet produced of the doctrines and theories on which free trade is based."—*Daily Mail*.

"The strongest plea for the abandonment of England's free trade policy which has yet been made."—*New York Sun*.

"Many books have been written against Socialism, but few popular writers have subjected it to so destructive a criticism as 'Legislator.'"—*Sunday Times*.

THE FISCAL DISPUTE MADE EASY.

By W. H. MALLOCK, Author of "The New Republic." Crown 8vo, 1s.

EVELEIGH NASH.

AN ABSENT-MINDED WAR.

By A BRITISH OFFICER. Fourteenth Edition. 192 pages. Crown 8vo, cloth, 2s. 6d. ; paper, 1s.

" . . . It should be read by every citizen who wishes to know his duty."—*Daily Mail*.

"Every word of this little shilling volume is worth weighing and quoting, and it would be well if the Army League or some really patriotic organisation could place a copy in the hands of every elector in the country and compel him to read it, and heckle the candidate for his vote and interest upon it afterward."—*Pall Mall Gazette*.

A COMMON-SENSE ARMY.

By the AUTHOR of "An Absent-Minded War." Fourth Edition. 190 pages. Crown 8vo, cloth, 2s. 6d. ; paper, 1s.

"This little book abounds in sound principles and excellent common sense."—*Times*.

"Whichever way we take them, his pages contain much suggestive and instructive reading."—*Westminster Gazette*.

A Charming Gift-Book.

LETTERS TO A DÉBUTANTE.

By LADY JEPHSON. Small crown 8vo, gilt top, 3s. 6d.

"Bright, chatty, and smartly written."—*Daily Telegraph*.

FICTION.

SIX SHILLING NOVELS.

THE INVASION OF 1910,

With a Full Account of the Siege of London. By WILLIAM LE QUEUX. Naval Chapters by H. W. WILSON. Introduction by LORD ROBERTS. Third Impression. Crown 8vo.

"A veteran soldier or a lynx-eyed war correspondent could not have written with more wealth of technical detail. . . . If he can wake up the sleepy officials of the War Office, Mr. Le Queux will have rendered a great national service."—*British Weekly*.

THE GREY DOMINO.

By Mrs. PHILIP CHAMPION DE CRESPIGNY, Author of "The Rose Brocade." Crown 8vo.

"A well-told romance of scenes laid in France at a time when the horrors of St. Bartholomew were still a vivid recollection, swords flashed freely at sight of a foe, and adventures were to be had for less than the asking."—*Pall Mall Gazette*.

"This is a brisk romance of the days of Henri Quatre, what time de Rosny was in authority. It has, however, little to do with politics, for which readers will be grateful, and a good deal with love and adventures."—*Daily Mail*.

SONS OF THE MILESIAINS.

By the COUNTESS OF CROMARTIE, Author of "The Web of the Past." Crown 8vo.

"A collection of stories which possess a distinctive charm and a characteristic personal touch . . . The simple dignity of the stories is always impressive."—*Vanity Fair*.

THE HOUSE IN SPRING GARDENS.

By Major ARTHUR GRIFFITHS, Author of "The Passenger from Calais," "The Rome Express," etc. Second Impression. Crown 8vo.

"We feel quite relieved when we remember that by this time the house in Spring Gardens is probably pulled down."—*Daily Telegraph*.

"This quick, vivid, pulsating story is bound to be well received."—*Standard*.

RAFFLES,

The Amateur Cracksman. By E. W. HORNING. Second Impression. Crown 8vo.

"Hats off to Raffles."—*Daily Telegraph*.

WHISPERS ABOUT WOMEN.

By LEONARD MERRICK. Crown 8vo.

"Our author is a cook who knows how to serve up an omelette as light as a feather, and no one will question the ingredients. He is a delightful companion for a holiday hour. None can fail to be amused."—*Globe*.

EVELEIGH NASH.

THE BLUE PETER.

By MORLEY ROBERTS, Author of "The Promotion of the Admiral," "Captain Balaam of 'The Cormorant,'" etc.

"For a book of sea stories delightfully fresh and humorous it would be difficult to beat 'The Blue Peter.'"—*Daily Telegraph*.

"Mr. Roberts is out for a lark in this book, and a lark he has."—*Athenæum*.

THE LAPSE OF VIVIEN EADY.

By CHARLES MARRIOTT, Author of "The Column," "Mrs. Alemere's Elopement," etc.

"It seems to us that Mr. Charles Marriott's 'Lapse of Vivien Eady' is the best book he has hitherto produced."—*Morning Post*.

"As a writer Mr. Marriott increases in virtue."—*Times*.

BARDELYS THE MAGNIFICENT.

By RAFAEL SABATINI, Author of "The Tavern Knights," etc.

"This romance belongs to the school of Mrs. Stanley Weyman, and it is doubtful if even that ingenious and spirited writer could have contrived a more ingenious and spirited yarn."—*Daily Mail*.

HE LOVED BUT ONE.

The Story of Lord Byron and Mary Chaworth. By F. FRANKFORT MOORE, Author of "The Jessamy Bride," etc.

"A great deal of loving study has gone to the making of this fine story."—*World*.

THE PARSON'S WOOD.

By VIOLET A. SIMPSON, Author of "The Bonnet Conspirators," etc.

"Here is a capital story . . . which holds the reader until the end is reached."—*Fall Mall Gazette*.

CAPTAIN MAROON.

A Romance. By ROBERT STUART.

"Real, vivid, and thrilling."—*Fall Mall Gazette*.

EVELEIGH NASH.

DEBORAH'S LIFE.

By JAMES BLYTH, Author of "Celibate Sarah," etc.

"Deborah is a variant of Tess, and she certainly holds the attention."—*Pall Mall Gazette*.

THE THIRD KISS.

By HERBERT FLOWERDEW, Author of "A Celibate's Wife," etc.

"The humour is of a particularly fine type."—*Pall Mall Gazette*.

"An exceedingly clever story."—*Scotsman*.

THE FLIGHT OF GEORGIANA.

By R. N. STEPHENS, Author of "A Gentleman Player," etc.

"A capital tale, told in an easy, natural style, of 18th century manners—not in town but the country—the inn, the hall, and the road."—*Times*.

THE WIND-JAMMERS.

By T. JENKINS HAINS.

"Mr. Hains knows a ship, and can tell a story; and has an adequate sense of the dramatic possibilities of sea life."—*Daily Mail*.

THE MATRIMONIAL BUREAU.

By CAROLYN WELLS.

"Acute in its observation of character . . . an amusing and enjoyable story."—*Scotsman*.

THE WEB OF THE PAST.

By the COUNTESS OF CROMARTIE, Author of "The End of the Song."

"Admirers of Celtic glamour will assuredly add this volume to their shelves."—*Daily Mail*.

THE PROCESSION OF LIFE.

By HORACE ANNESLEY VACHELL, Author of "Brothers," "The Hill," etc. Fifth Impression.

"Mr. Vachell's book is one to get and to read, and, when read, to keep for reading again."—*Daily Telegraph*.

EVELEIGH NASH.

OUTCASTS OF THE EAST.

By FLORENCE BAILEY.

"This powerful book is sure to be widely read."—*Scotsman*.

"It is, in a word, a novel worth reading—and thinking over."—*Daily Telegraph*.

BROTHERS OF PERIL.

By THEODORE ROBERTS.

"The story never flags, and is admirably written."—*Manchester Courier*.

THE SEVEN STREAMS.

By WARWICK DEEPING, Author of "Uther and Igraine," "Love among the Ruins."

"'The Seven Streams' is a fine tale . . . full of strong emotions. . . . Picturesque description is Mr. Deeping's special gift, and he has it in large measure."—*Morning Post*.

THE NUNNERY WALL.

By ELIZABETH HOLLAND (Lady Owen).

"This romance ranks at all events among the finest first books of all the novelists."—*Yorkshire Post*.

"Of absorbing interest."—*Pall Mall Gazette*.

MRS. ALEMERE'S ELOPEMENT.

By CHARLES MARRIOTT, Author of "The Column."

"We welcome the new book."—*Times*.

"Clever and powerfully written."—*Daily Telegraph*.

"An outstanding novel . . . a work of art."—*Daily Chronicle*.

"By far the best book Mr. Marriott has yet written."—*Daily Mail*.

THE PASSENGER FROM CALAIS.

By Major ARTHUR GRIFFITHS, Author of "The Rome Express," etc.

"A plot as involved as it is thrilling."—*Pall Mall Gazette*.

"It is not every author who can write stirring fiction like this."—*Daily Express*.

EVELEIGH NASH.

MEN OF THE NORTH SEA.

By WALTER WOOD.

"A more acceptable volume of stories . . . was never published . . . These simple men, with their confiding trust in every printed word, and their amusing ignorance, are heroes when the time comes, and their little-known life is well worth the faithful, telling representation here given with such timeliness and force."—*Pall Mall Gazette*.

THE GOLDEN THREAD.

By TOM GALLON, Author of "Tatterley," etc.

"The best that Mr. Gallon has produced for some time."—*Morning Post*.

"A very pretty, amusing, and uncommon story."—*Daily Chronicle*.

"Wholesome and pleasant."—*Standard*.

THE OTHER WORLD.

By F. FRANKFORT MOORE, Author of "The Jessamy Bride," etc.

"It is the sort of volume that proves an excellent companion—together with a deck chair and an idle hour."—*Scotsman*.

HIGH NOON.

By ALICE BROWN, Author of "The Mannerings," etc.

"She has ideas and rouses thought; in these matters of love she has a high spiritual standard which will appeal to all but the out-and-out rationalists, and even they may find that her intelligent 'tossing' of a tangled question lets in some light and air."—*Times*.

"No one could read this new volume . . . without recognising that here is a woman of genius, with a fine romantic spirit free from that note of vulgarity and self-assertion that is so marked in so much of the fiction produced to-day."—*Sphere*.

A MAID AT LARGE.

By A. LEAF, Author of "Strawberry Leaves."

A DAUGHTER OF KINGS.

By KATHARINE TYNAN, Author of "A Red Red Rose," etc.

"A charming Irish novel."—*Morning Post*.

EVELEIGH NASH.

The Romance of a Maid of Honour in the days of King George I.

THE ROSE BROCADE.

By MRS. PHILIP CHAMPION DE CRESPIGNY, Author of "The Mischief of a Glove."

"A book which will most deservedly find many delighted readers."—*Bookman*.

SOPHY BUNCE.

By THOMAS COBB, Author of "Mrs. Belfort's Stratagem."

"Singularly pleasant, and told with great skill."—*St. James's Gazette*.

A Great Human Story.

SETH OF THE CROSS.

By ALPHONSE COURLANDER, Author of "The Taskmaster."

"A powerful story."—*Morning Post*.

"'Seth of the Cross' is a good-book that should have a popular as well as an artistic success."—*Pall Mall Gazette*.

THE BRIGHT FACE OF DANGER.

By R. N. STEPHENS, Author of "An Enemy to the King," "A Gentleman Player," etc.

"'The Bright Face of Danger' is a good tale of adventure drawn from an interesting period of French history. The plot is an ingenious one, and there is no lack of excitement."—*Westminster Gazette*.

JEZEBEL'S HUSBAND.

By MARK ASHTON, Author of "She Stands Alone."

"This is a story of the city of Damascus, 3000 years ago. It is a fine piece of work, in which the reader's interest is never allowed to flag."—*Outlook*.

EVELEIGH NASH.

MRS. BELFORT'S STRATAGEM.

By THOMAS COBB, Author of "The Intriguers," "A Change of Face," etc.

"A bright, clean example of the English novel. . . . An excellently told, bright, and well-written story."—*Morning Post*.

THE AFTER COST.

By K. M. EDGE, Author of "Ahana," etc.

"One quality the writer has, which must always rank high in a novelist's equipment. She has the instinct for story, and that, after all, is one of the essentials."—*Athenæum*.

THE GREEN EYE OF GOONA.

By ARTHUR MORRISON, Author of "The Red Triangle," "Tales of Mean Streets," etc.

"A capital piece of work."—*Standard*.

THE TRIUMPH OF MRS. ST. GEORGE.

By PERCY WHITE, Author of "Park Lane," "The West End."

"In none of the novels that have gone to make his reputation as a satirist of certain phases of West-End life is the dialogue more sparkling or the character-drawing more vivacious."—*Athenæum*.

"Now mordantly amusing, now poignantly sad."—*Vanity Fair*.

RACHEL MARR.

By MORLEY ROBERTS.

"Mr. Morley Roberts's finest achievement."—*Morning Post*.

"Beautifully conceived."—*Academy*.

"A fine novel. It raises its author to a high place."—*Vanity Fair*.

"One of the most remarkable novels of the generation."—*Queen*.

THE LAND OF SILENCE.

By G. B. BURGIN, Author of "The Way Out," "The Shutters of Silence."

"It has the indefinite charm of all tales told by the born story-teller."—*Times*.

EVELEIGH NASH.

THE ADMIRABLE TINKER.

By EDGAR JEPSON.

. The Admirable Tinker is the greatest boy hero since Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer.

"Mr. Jepson has a light touch, and his gaiety is infectious."—*Star*.

THE WINE OF LOVE.

By H. A. HINKSON, Author of "O'Grady of Trinity."

"Sparkling with Irish wit and humour, this novel is perhaps the best that has yet appeared from the author's pen."—*Outlook*.

THE LETTERS WHICH NEVER REACHED HIM.

ANONYMOUS.

"Surely the most pathetic love-letters that ever were written."—*Outlook*.

LORD AND LADY ASTON.

By E. H. COOPER, Author of "Mr. Blake of Newmarket," etc.

"Mr. Cooper's book is worth pondering, for if one half of its grim indictment rests on fact, what are we to think of the huge racing carnival which will occupy Society from now till the end of the season."—*British Weekly*.

HIS EMINENCE.

By LADY HELEN FORBES, Author of "An Outcast Emperor," etc.

"Full of dramatic episodes, which hold the reader's interest until the last page."—*Daily Telegraph*.

THE STRONGER CLAIM.

By ALICE PERRIN, Author of "East of Suez."

"Cannot fail to attract all who feel the fascination of the gorgeous East."—*Pall Mall Gazette*.

"Strongly felt and conceived."—*Times*.

EVELEIGH NASH.

TRENT'S TRUST.

By BRET HARTE.

"We find in it the touch of a vanished hand. . . . One would be sorry to miss the book."—*Athenaeum*.

THE DIARY OF A YEAR.

By Mrs. CHARLES H. E. BROOKFIELD.

"Mrs. Brookfield avoids monotony because she writes well. She knows the world, and her touch, though it is light, is very sure."—*Punch*.

A RED RED ROSE.

By KATHARINE TYNAN.

"A wholesome and pleasant story."—*Glasgow Herald*.

THE INTRIGUERS.

By THOMAS COBB.

"Always an agreeable and entertaining writer, 'The Intriguers' is quite his best book so far."—*Daily Mail*.

THE MANNERINGS.

By ALICE BROWN.

"A strong, subtle, and sympathetic work."—*St. James's Gazette*.

THE MYSTERY OF MURRAY DAVENPORT.

By R. N. STEPHENS.

"To the jaded novel-reader its perfect newness will be a most genuine refresher."—*Pall Mall Gazette*.

EVELEIGH NASH.

STRAWBERRY LEAVES.

By A. LEAF.

"A very able book. The people in its pages are real human beings, so real that one cannot help thinking that they must be taken from life."—*Queen*.

THE NEVER-NEVER LAND.

By WILSON BARRETT, Author of "The Sign of the Cross."

"There is a sustained movement about it that keeps the reader constantly interested."—*Glasgow Herald*.

THE COUNTESS AND THE KING'S DIARY.

By PERCY WHITE.

"Mr. Percy White's work is both ingenious and amusing."—*St. James's Gazette*.

NOBODY'S BABY.

By TOM GALLON.

"A very pathetic idea is embodied in this charming story, and it furnishes a convenient plot on which to hang a subsidiary romance."—*Spectator*.

THE PRIME MINISTER AND MRS. GRANTHAM.

By CARLTON DAWK.

"The author has a faculty of shrewd observation and a dramatic talent that have turned out between them a very interesting story."—*Vanity Fair*.

A MAN-AT-ARMS.

By CLINTON SCOLLARD.

"The story is distinctly a success."—*Spectator*.

EVELEIGH NASH.

THE RED TRIANGLE.

By ARTHUR MORRISON.

"A book which is sure to attract many readers."—*Observer*.

ONE PRETTY PILGRIM'S PROGRESS.

By FLORENCE BRIGHT, Author of "The Vision Splendid."

"The interest of the story is always sustained, and carries the reader along with it."—*Morning Post*.

THE CRUCIBLE.

By A. F. SLADE, Author of "A Wayside Weed," etc.

"The book is brightly and interestingly written."—*Daily Mail*.

THE WRONG ROAD.

By Major ARTHUR GRIFFITHS.

THE PASSION FOR ROMANCE.

By EDGAR JEPSON, Author of "The Admirable Tinker."

"The hero is treated from a refreshingly new standpoint. He is a new sort of hero as well as a fresh specimen in individuals: neither villain, saint, nor martyr, but simply a possible human being with some strong characteristics."—*Athenaeum*.

SAINT PORTH.

The Wooing of Dolly Pentreath. By J. HENRY HARRIS.

"A Cornish tale of remarkable picturesqueness, although natural and touching, full of quaint pictures of a marvellously decorative people."—*Saturday Review*.

EVELEIGH NASH.

THREE SHILLINGS AND SIXPENCE.

*A Large New Edition in cloth of the late
Mr. Wilson Barrett's Great Novel.*

THE SIGN OF THE CROSS.

By WILSON BARRETT.

THE PROMOTION OF THE ADMIRAL.

By MORLEY ROBERTS.

"Very delightful as well as very unusual."—*Spectator*.

**CAPTAIN BALAAM OF "THE COR-
MORANT."**

By MORLEY ROBERTS, Author of "The Promotion of the Admiral,"
etc.

"A book full of smiles."—*Daily Telegraph*.

A SET OF FLATS.

By Major ARTHUR GRIFFITHS.

"A detective story of the best kind. . . . There will be a general desire on
the part of the public for more work of the same nature from the same
author."—*Daily Express*.

THE PASSING OF ARTHUR.

By COSMO HAMILTON.

"An amusing farrago of personalities, impudences, and absurdities."—
Vanity Fair.

"A cleverly sustained 'squib' which will be chuckled over by readers of
every shade of political opinion."—*World*.

THE BLUE FOX.

By W. H. HELM.

"We can promise for the enlightened reader far more entertainment in
'The Blue Fox' than he will find in the more insistently humorous novels of
the day."—*Times*.

EVELEIGH NASH.

TWO SHILLINGS AND SIXPENCE.

THE ROME EXPRESS.

By Major ARTHUR GRIFFITHS.

"Any reader who opens this book with the resolution that he will read a chapter of it and then resume his ordinary occupations is likely to be surprised speedily out of such good intentions. The story grips you like a vice."—*Sketch*.

A SEA COMEDY.

By MORLEY ROBERTS, Author of "A Son of Empire," "The Western Avernus," etc. 2s. 6d.

"'A Sea Comedy' is great fun, and the only fault we have to find with it is that it is too short."—*Athenæum*.

CLARE MONRO.

The Story of a Mother and Daughter. By HANNAH LYNCH.
2s. 6d.

"There are passages in this brief story for which no praise could be too high. . . . The book well answers to the description of the series which 'is designed to meet the taste of readers who desire a swiftly-moving, well-written, dramatic tale of moderate length, with continuity and action from the first page to the last.' Such readers will have their desires gratified, though the movement is more of thought than incident, and it results from a breach of the Seventh Commandment."—*Sheffield Daily Telegraph*.

SONGS AND SONNETS.

By OSWALD NORMAN. 5s.

"A delicate and reflective mind informs the whole volume, and whether Mr. Norman writes of the everlasting verities, or . . . whether he touches upon the vanities of human life, his lines have always an uplifting quality, which should assure the poet the lasting goodwill and devotion of many readers."—*Referee*.

EVELEIGH NASH.

SIXPENNY NOVELS.

THE SIGN OF THE CROSS.

By WILSON BARRETT.

STRAWBERRY LEAVES.

By A. LEAF.

MRS. ALEMERE'S ELOPEMENT.

By CHARLES MARRIOTT.

THE PROCESSION OF LIFE.

By HORACE ANNESLEY VACHELL.

THE PROMOTION OF THE ADMIRAL.

By MORLEY ROBERTS.

THE SHUTTERS OF SILENCE.

By G. B. BURGIN.

THE RED TRIANGLE.

By ARTHUR MORRISON.

**THE INFATUATION OF THE
COUNTESS.**

By PERCY WHITE.

INDEX TO AUTHORS.

- Anonymous.** Letters which never reached Him.
Anonymous. Private Life of Two Emperors. (2 vols.)
Ashton, Mark. Jezebel's Husband.
- Bailey, Florence.** Outcasts of the East.
Barrett, Wilson. Never-Never Land.
Barrett, Wilson. Sign of the Cross.
Blyth, James. Deborah's Life.
Blyth, James. Lawful Issue.
Bright, Florence. One Pretty Pilgrim's Progress.
British Officer. Absent-Minded War.
British Officer. Common-Sense Army.
Brooke, Lord. An Eye-Witness in Manchuria.
Brookfield, Mrs. Charles H. E. Diary of a Year.
Brown, Alice. High Noon.
Brown, Alice. Mannerings.
Burgin, G. B. Land of Silence.
Burgin, G. B. Shutters of Silence.
- Campbell, Lady Colin.** A Woman's Walks.
Carl, Katharine A. With the Empress Dowager of China.
Cebb, Thomas. Intriguers.
Cobb, Thomas. Mrs. Belfort's Stratagem.
- Cobb, Thomas.** Sophy Bunce.
Cooper, E. H. Lord and Lady Aston.
Courlander, Alphonse. Seth of the Cross.
Craven, Mary. Famous Beauties of Two Reigns.
Cromartie, Countess of. Web of the Past.
Cromartie, Countess of. Sons of the Milesians.
Dawe, Carlton. Prime Minister and Mrs. Grantham.
Declé, Lionel. The New Russia.
De Crespigny, Mrs. Philip Champion. Rose Brocade.
De Crespigny, Mrs. Philip Champion. The Grey Domino.
Deeping, Warwick. Seven Streams.
De La Warr, Constance, Countess. A Twice Crowned Queen, Anne or Brittany.
De La Warr, Constance, Countess. Thoughts from Montaigne.
- Eccles, Charlotte O'Connor.** The Matrimonial Lottery.
Edge, K. M. After Cost.
Farmer, James E. Versailles and the Court under Louis XIV.

EVELEIGH NASH.

Fea, Allan. Nooks and Corners of Old England.

Fletcher, J. S. Mr. Poskitt.

Flowerdew, Herbert. Third Kiss.

Forbes, Lady Helen. His Eminence.

Gallon, Tom. Golden Thread.

Gallon, Tom. Nobody's Baby.

Gouldsbury, Cullen. God's Outpost.

Griffiths, Major Arthur. Passenger from Calais.

Griffiths, Major Arthur. Rome Express.

Griffiths, Major Arthur. Set of Flats.

Griffiths, Major Arthur. Wrong Road.

Griffiths, Major Arthur. House in Spring Gardens.

Grimshaw, Beatrice. From Fiji to the Cannibal Islands.

Hains, T. Jenkins. Wind-Jammers.

Hamilton, Cosmo. Passing of Arthur.

Hamilton, Lady. Secret History of the Court of England.

Harris, J. Henry. Saint Porth.

Harte, Bret. Trent's Trust.

Helm, W. H. Aspects of Balzac.

Helm, W. H. Blue Fox.

Hinkson, H. A. Wine of Love.

Holland, Elizabeth. Nunnery Wall.

Hornung, E. W. Raffles, the Amateur Cracksman.

Hughes, Rupert. Love Affairs of Great Musicians. (2 vols.)

Hume, Martin. Wives of Henry VIII.

Hume, Martin. Courtships of Queen Elizabeth.

Hume, Martin. Love Affairs of Mary, Queen of Scots.

Hume, Martin. Spanish Influence on English Literature.

Hume, Martin. The Great Lord Burghley (William Cecil).

Innes, Arthur D. Ten Tudor Statesmen.

Innes, Norman. The Surge of War.

Ireland, William W. Life of Sir Henry Vane the Younger.

Jephson, Lady. Letters to a Debutante.

Jepson, Edgar. Admirable Tinker.

Jepson, Edgar. Passion for Romance.

Joubert, Carl. Russia as it Really Is.

Joubert, Carl. Truth about the Tsar.

Joubert, Carl. Fall of Tsardom.

Lamington, Lord. In the Days of the Dandies.

Lansdale, M. H. The Châteaux of Touraine.

Leaf, A. Maid at Large.

Leaf, A. Strawberry Leaves.

Legislator. Coming Reaction.

Le Queux, William. The Invasion of 1910.

Lesueur, Daniel. The Power of the Past.

Lynch, Hannah. Clare Moura.

M'Cullagh, Francis. With the Cossacks.

Mallock, W. H. Fiscal Dispute Made Easy.

Marriott, Charles. Lapse of Vivien Eady.

Marriott, Charles. Mrs. Alemere's Elopement.

Marriott, Charles. Women and the West.

Mead, L. A. Milton's England.

Merrick, Leonard. Whispers about Women.

EVELEIGH NASH.

Mijavich, Chedomille. A Royal Tragedy.

Miltoun, Francis. Dickens' London.

Moore, F. Frankfort. He Loved but One.

Moore, F. Frankfort. Other World.

Morrison, Arthur. Green Eye of Goona.

Morrison Arthur. Red Triangle.

Munster, Countess of. My Memories.

Norman, Oswald. Songs and Sonnets.

Perrin, Alice. Stronger Claim.

Randal, John. The Manager's Box.

Reich, Dr. Emil. Success in Life.

Roberts, Morley. Captain Balaam of "The Cormorant."

Roberts, Morley. The Blue Peter.

Roberts, Morley. Promotion of the Admiral.

Roberts, Morley. Rachel Marr.

Roberts, Morley. Sea Comedy.

Roberts, Morley. The Red Burgee.

Roberts, Theodore. Brothers of Peril.

Sabatini, R. Bardelys the Magnificent.

Scollard, Clinton. Man-at-Arms.

Siegfried, André. The Two Races in Canada.

Simpson, Violet A. Parson's Wood.

Slade, A. F. Crucible.

Smith, W. Richmond. Siege and Fall of Port Arthur.

Stephens, R. N. Bright Face of Danger.

Stephens, R. N. Flight of Georgiana.

Stephens, R. N. Mystery of Murray Davenport.

Strickland, Agnes. Lives of the Queens of England. (16 vols.)

Stuart, Robert. Captain Maroon.

Tynan, Katharine. Daughter of Kings.

Tynan, Katharine. Red Red Rose.

Vachell, Horace Annesley. Procession of Life.

Vachell, Horace Annesley. A Drama in Sunshine.

Wellesley, Col. the Hon. F. A. With the Russians in Peace and War.

Wells, Carolyn. Matrimonial Bureau.

White, Percy. Countess and the King's Diary.

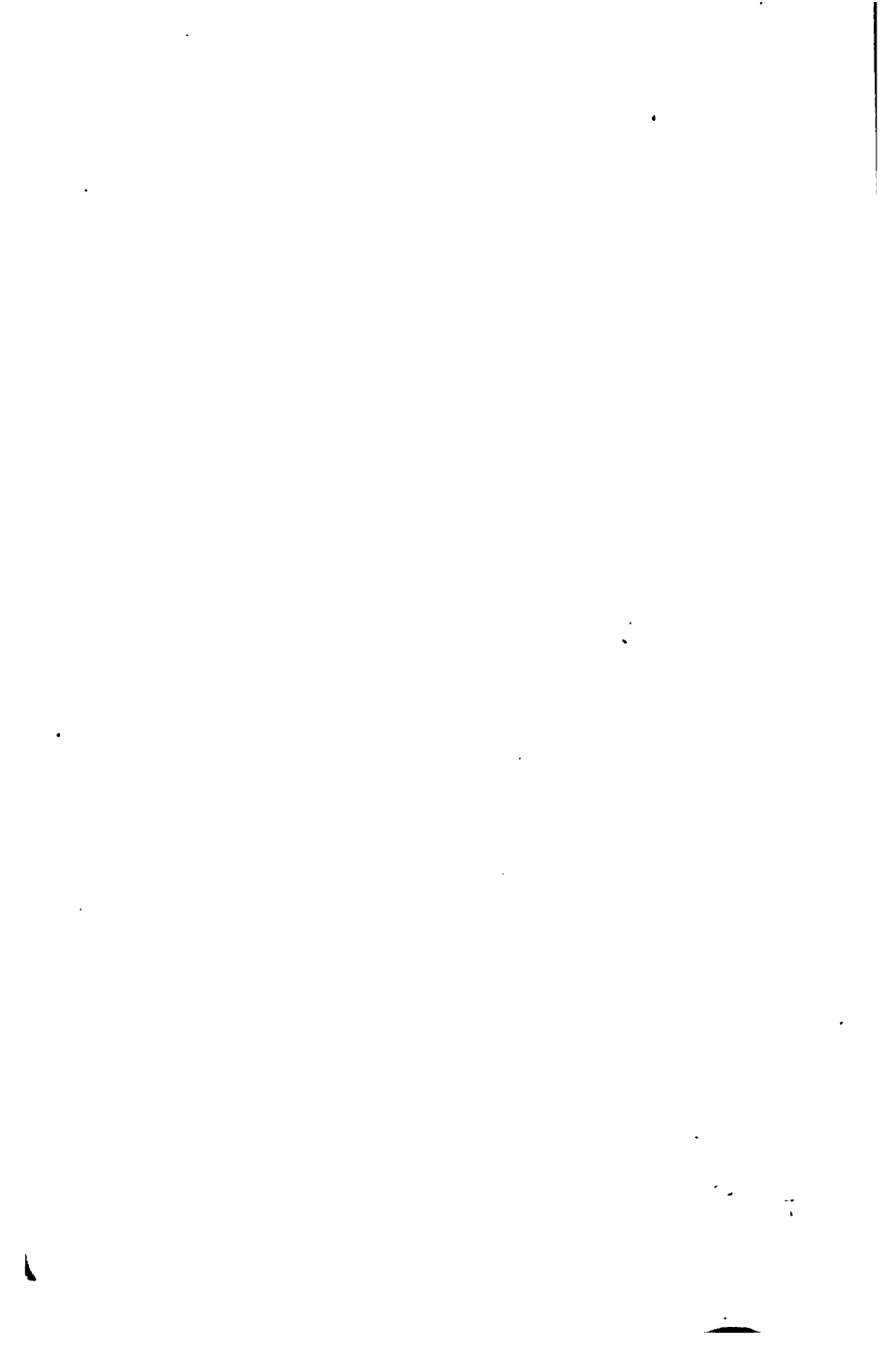
White, Percy. Triumph of Mrs. St. George.

White, Percy. Infatuation of the Countess.

Wood, Walter. Men of the North Sea.

Wright, George Frederick. Asiatic Russia. (2 vols.)

1





This book should be returned to
the Library on or before the last date
stamped below.

A fine is incurred by retaining it
beyond the specified time.

Please return promptly.

